

COLLECTED PLAYS

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MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

Characters

PART I

A CHORUS OF WOMEN OF CANTERBURY
THREE PRIESTS OF THE CATHEDRAL
A MESSENGER
ARCHBISHOP THOMAS BECKET
FOUR TEMPTERS
ATTENDANTS

*The scene is the Archbishop's Hall,
on December 2nd, 1170*

PART II

THREE PRIESTS
FOUR KNIGHTS
ARCHBISHOP THOMAS BECKET
CHORUS OF WOMEN OF CANTERBURY
ATTENDANTS

*The first scene is in the Archbishop's Hall,
the second scene is in the Cathedral,
on December 29th, 1170*

Part I

CHORUS. Here let us stand, close by the cathedral. Here let us wait.

Are we drawn by danger? Is it the knowledge of safety, that draws
our feet

Towards the cathedral? What danger can be

For us, the poor, the poor women of Canterbury? what tribulation

With which we are not already familiar? There is no danger

For us, and there is no safety in the cathedral. Some presage of an
act

Which our eyes are compelled to witness, has forced our feet

Towards the cathedral. We are forced to bear witness.

Since golden October declined into sombre November

And the apples were gathered and stored, and the land became

brown sharp points of death in a waste of water and mud,

The New Year waits, breathes, waits, whispers in darkness.

While the labourer kicks off a muddy boot and stretches his hand
to the fire,

The New Year waits, destiny waits for the coming.

Who has stretched out his hand to the fire and remembered the

Saints at All Hallows,

Remembered the martyrs and saints who wait? and who shall

Stretch out his hand to the fire, and deny his master? who shall be
warm

By the fire, and deny his master?

Seven years and the summer is over

Seven years since the Archbishop left us,

He who was always kind to his people.

But it would not be well if he should return.

King rules or barons rule;

^We have suffered various oppression,

But mostly we are left to our own devices,

And we are content if we are left alone.

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We try to keep our households in order;
The merchant, shy and cautious, tries to compile a little fortune,
And the labourer bends to his piece of earth, earth-colour, his own
colour,

Preferring to pass unobserved.

Now I fear disturbance of the quiet seasons:

Winter shall come bringing death from the sea,

Ruinous spring shall beat at our doors,

Root and shoot shall eat our eyes and our ears,

Disastrous summer burn up the beds of our streams

And the poor shall wait for another decaying October.

Why should the summer bring consolation

For autumn fires and winter fogs?

What shall we do in the heat of summer

But wait in barren orchards for another October?

Some malady is coming upon us. We wait, we wait,

And the saints and martyrs wait, for those who shall be martyrs and
saints.

✓ Destiny waits in the hand of God, shaping the still unshapen:

I have seen these things in a shaft of sunlight.

✓ Destiny waits in the hand of God, not in the hands of statesmen

Who do, some well, some ill, planning and guessing,

Having their aims which turn in their hands in the pattern of time.

Come, happy December, who shall observe you, who shall preserve
you?

Shall the Son of Man be born again in the litter of scorn?

For us, the poor, there is no action,

But only to wait and to witness. .†

[Enter PRIESTS]

FIRST PRIEST. Seven years and the summer is over.

Seven years since the Archbishop left us.

SECOND PRIEST. What does the Archbishop do, and our Sovereign

Lord the Pope

With the stubborn King and the French King

In ceaseless intrigue, combinations,

In conference, meetings accepted, meetings refused,

Meetings unended or endless

At one place or another in France?

THIRD PRIEST. I see nothing quite conclusive in the art of temporal
government,

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But violence, duplicity and frequent malversation.

* King rules or barons rule:

The strong man strongly and the weak man by caprice.

* They have but one law, to seize the power and keep it,
And the steadfast can manipulate the greed and lust of others,
The feeble is devoured by his own. *

FIRST PRIEST. Shall these things not end

Until the poor at the gate

Have forgotten their friend, their Father in God, have forgotten
That they had a friend?

[Enter MESSENGER]

MESSENGER. Servants of God, and watchers of the temple,

I am here to inform you, without circumlocution:

The Archbishop is in England, and is close outside the city.

I was sent before in haste

To give you notice of his coming, as much as was possible,
That you may prepare to meet him.

FIRST PRIEST. What, is the exile ended, is our Lord Archbishop
Reunited with the King? what reconciliation
Of two proud men?

THIRD PRIEST. What peace can be found
To grow between the hammer and the anvil?

SECOND PRIEST. Tell us,
Are the old disputes at an end, is the wall of pride cast down
That divided them? Is it peace or war?

FIRST PRIEST. Does he come
In full assurance, or only secure
In the power of Rome, the spiritual rule,
The assurance of right, and the love of the people?

MESSENGER. You are right to express a certain incredulity.
He comes in pride and sorrow, affirming all his claims,
Assured, beyond doubt, of the devotion of the people,
Who receive him with scenes of frenzied enthusiasm,
Lining the road and throwing down their capes,
Strewing the way with leaves and late flowers of the season.
The streets of the city will be packed to suffocation,
And I think that his horse will be deprived of its tail,
A single hair of which becomes a precious relic.
He is at one with the Pope, and with the King of France,
Who indeed would have liked to detain him in his kingdom:

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But as for our King, that is another matter.

FIRST PRIEST. But again, is it war or peace?

MESSANGER.

Peace, but not the kiss of peace.

A patched up affair, if you ask my opinion.

And if you ask me, I think the Lord Archbishop

Is not the man to cherish any illusions,

Or yet to diminish the least of his pretensions.

If you ask my opinion, I think that this peace

Is nothing like an end, or like a beginning.

It is common knowledge that when the Archbishop

Parted from the King, he said to the King,

My Lord, he said, I leave you as a man

Whom in this life I shall not see again.

I have this, I assure you, on the highest authority;

There are several opinions as to what he meant,

But no one considers it a happy prognostic.

[Exit]

FIRST PRIEST. I fear for the Archbishop, I fear for the Church,

I know that the pride bred of sudden prosperity

Was but confirmed by bitter adversity.

I saw him as Chancellor, flattered by the King.

Liked or feared by courtiers, in their overbearing fashion,

Despised and despising, always isolated,

Never one among them, always insecure;

His pride always feeding upon his own virtues,

Pride drawing sustenance from impartiality,

Pride drawing sustenance from generosity,

Loathing power given by temporal devolution,

Wishing subjection to God alone.

Had the King been greater, or had he been weaker

Things had perhaps been different for Thomas. *

SECOND PRIEST. Yet our lord is returned. Our lord has come back to
his own again.

We have had enough of waiting, from December to dismal
December.

The Archbishop shall be at our head, dispelling dismay and doubt.

He will tell us what we are to do, he will give us our orders, instruct
us.

Our Lord is at one with the Pope, and also the King of France.

We can lean on a rock, we can feel a firm foothold

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Against the perpetual wash of tides of balance of forces of barons
and landholders.

The rock of God is beneath our feet. Let us meet the Archbishop
with cordial thanksgiving:

Our lord, our Archbishop returns. And when the Archbishop
returns

Our doubts are dispelled. Let us therefore rejoice,
I say rejoice, and show a glad face for his welcome.

I am the Archbishop's man. Let us give the Archbishop welcome!

THIRD PRIEST.^x For good or ill, let the wheel turn.

The wheel has been still, these seven years, and no good.

For ill or good, let the wheel turn.

For who knows the end of good or evil?

Until the grinders cease

And the door shall be shut in the street,

And all the daughters of music shall be brought low.^x

CHORUS. Here is no continuing city, here is no abiding stay.

Ill the wind, ill the time, uncertain the profit, certain the danger.

O late late late, late is the time, late too late, and rotten the year;

Evil the wind, and bitter the sea, and grey the sky, grey grey grey.

O Thomas, return, Archbishop; return, return to France.

Return. Quickly. Quietly. Leave us to perish in quiet.

You come with applause, you come with rejoicing, but you come
bringing death into Canterbury:

A doom on the house, a doom on yourself, a doom on the world.

We do not wish anything to happen.

Seven years we have lived quietly,

Succeeded in avoiding notice,

Living and partly living.

There have been oppression and luxury,

There have been poverty and licence,

There has been minor injustice.

Yet we have gone on living,

Living and partly living.

Sometimes the corn has failed us,

Sometimes the harvest is good,

One year is a year of rain,

Another a year of dryness,

One year the apples are abundant,

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Another year the plums are lacking.

Yet we have gone on living,

Living and partly living.

We have kept the feasts, heard the masses,

We have brewed beer and cider,

Gathered wood against the winter,

Talked at the corner of the fire,

Talked at the corners of streets,

Talked not always in whispers,

Living and partly living.

We have seen births, deaths and marriages,

We have had various scandals,

We have been afflicted with taxes,

We have had laughter and gossip,

Several girls have disappeared

Unaccountably, and some not able to.

We have all had our private terrors,

Our particular shadows, our secret fears.

But now a great fear is upon us, a fear not of one but of many,

A fear like birth and death, when we see birth and death alone

In a void apart. We

Are afraid in a fear which we cannot know, which we cannot face,
which none understands,

And our hearts are torn from us, our brains unskinned like the
layers of an onion, our selves are lost lost

In a final fear which none understands. O Thomas Archbishop,

O Thomas our Lord, leave us and leave us be, in our humble and
tarnished frame of existence, leave us; do not ask us

To stand to the doom on the house, the doom on the Archbishop,
the doom on the world.

Archbishop, secure and assured of your fate, unaffrayed among the
shades, do you realise what you ask, do you realise what it
means

To the small folk drawn into the pattern of fate, the small folk who
live among small things,

The strain on the brain of the small folk who stand to the doom of
the house, the doom of their lord, the doom of the world? 7

O Thomas, Archbishop, leave us, leave us, leave sullen Dover, and
set sail for France. Thomas our Archbishop still our
Archbishop even in France. Thomas Archbishop, set the

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white sail between the grey sky and the bitter sea, leave us,
leave us for France.

SECOND PRIEST. What a way to talk at such a juncture!

You are foolish, immodest and babbling women.

Do you not know that the good Archbishop

Is likely to arrive at any moment?

The crowds in the streets will be cheering and cheering,

You go on croaking like frogs in the treetops:

But frogs at least can be cooked and eaten.

✓ Whatever you are afraid of, in your craven apprehension, ~~can be~~

✓ Let me ask you at the least to put on pleasant faces,

And give a hearty welcome to our good Archbishop.

[Enter THOMAS]

THOMAS. Peace. And let them be, in their exaltation.

✓ They speak better than they know, and beyond your understanding.

They know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.

✓ They know and do not know, that action is suffering

And suffering is action. Neither does the agent suffer

Nor the patient act. But both are fixed

In an eternal action, an eternal patience

To which all must consent that it may be willed

And which all must suffer that they may will it,

That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is the action

And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still

Be forever still. x

SECOND PRIEST. O my Lord, forgive me, I did not see you coming,

Engrossed by the chatter of these foolish women.

Forgive us, my Lord, you would have had a better welcome

If we had been sooner prepared for the event.

But your Lordship knows that seven years of waiting,

Seven years of prayer, seven years of emptiness,

Have better prepared our hearts for your coming,

Than seven days could make ready Canterbury.

However, I will have fires laid in all your rooms

To take the chill off our English December,

Your Lordship now being used to a better climate.

Your Lordship will find your rooms in order as you left them.

THOMAS. And will try to leave them in order as I find them.

I am more than grateful for all your kind attentions.

These are small matters. Little rest in Canterbury

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With eager enemies restless about us.
Rebellious bishops, York, London, Salisbury,
Would have intercepted our letters,
Filled the coast with spies and sent to meet me
Some who hold me in bitterest hate.
By God's grace aware of their prevision
I sent my letters on another day,
Had fair crossing, found at Sandwich
Broc, Warenne, and the Sheriff of Kent,
Those who had sworn to have my head from me
Only John, the Dean of Salisbury,
Fearing for the King's name, warning against treason,
Made them hold their hands. So for the time
We are unmolested.

FIRST PRIEST. But do they follow after?

THOMAS. For a little time the hungry hawk
Will only soar and hover, circling lower,
Waiting excuse, pretence, opportunity.
End will be simple, sudden, God-given.
Meanwhile the substance of our first act
Will be shadows, and the strife with shadows.
Heavier the interval than the consummation.
All things prepare the event. Watch.

[Enter FIRST TEMPTER]

FIRST TEMPTER. You see, my Lord, I do not wait upon ceremony:
Here I have come, forgetting all acrimony,
Hoping that your present gravity
Will find excuse for my humble levity
Remembering all the good time past.
Your Lordship won't despise an old friend out of favour?
Old Tom, gay Tom, Becket of London,
Your Lordship won't forget that evening on the river
When the King, and you and I were all friends together?
Friendship should be more than biting Time can sever.
What, my Lord, now that you recover
Favour with the King, shall we say that summer's over
Or that the good time cannot last?
Fluting in the meadows, viols in the hall,
Laughter and apple-blossom floating on the water,
Singing at nightfall, whispering in chambers,

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Fires devouring the winter season,
Eating up the darkness, with wit and wine and wisdom!
Now that the King and you are in amity,
Clergy and laity may return to gaiety,
Mirth and sportfulness need not walk warily.

THOMAS. You talk of seasons that are past. I remember
Not worth forgetting.

TEMPTER. And of the new season.
Spring has come in winter. Snow in the branches
Shall float as sweet as blossoms. Ice along the ditches
Mirror the sunlight. Love in the orchard
Send the sap shooting. Mirth matches melancholy.

THOMAS. We do not know very much of the future
Except that from generation to generation
The same things happen again and again.
Men learn little from others' experience.
But in the life of one man, never
The same time returns. Sever
The cord, shed the scale. Only
The fool, fixed in his folly, may think
He can turn the wheel on which he turns. ✕

TEMPTER. My Lord, a nod is as good as a wink.
A man will often love what he spurns.
For the good times past, that are come again
I am your man.

THOMAS. Not in this train
Look to your behaviour. You were safer
Think of penitence and follow your master.

TEMPTER. Not at this gait!
If you go so fast, others may go faster.
Your Lordship is too proud!
The safest beast is not the one that roars most loud,
This was not the way of the King our master!
You were not used to be so hard upon sinners
When they were your friends. Be easy, man!
The easy man lives to eat the best dinners.
Take a friend's advice. Leave well alone,
Or your goose may be cooked and eaten to the bone.

THOMAS. You come twenty years too late.

TEMPTER. Then I leave you to your fate.

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I leave you to the pleasures of your higher vices,
Which will have to be paid for at higher prices.
Farewell, my Lord, I do not wait upon ceremony,
I leave as I came, forgetting all acrimony,
Hoping that your present gravity
Will find excuse for my humble levity. ♪
If you will remember me, my Lord, at your prayers,
I'll remember you at kissing-time below the stairs.

THOMAS. Leave-well-alone, the springtime fancy,
So one thought goes whistling down the wind.
The impossible is still temptation.
The impossible, the undesirable,
Voices under sleep, waking a dead world,
So that the mind may not be whole in the present.

[Enter SECOND TEMPTER]

SECOND TEMPTER. Your Lordship has forgotten me, perhaps. I will
remind you.

We met at Clarendon, at Northampton,
And last at Montmirail, in Maine. Now that I have recalled them,
Let us but set these not too pleasant memories
In balance against other, earlier
And weightier ones: those of the Chancellorship.
See how the late ones rise! You, master of policy
Whom all acknowledged, should guide the state again.

THOMAS. Your meaning?

TEMPTER. The Chancellorship that you resigned
When you were made Archbishop — that was a mistake
On your part — still may be regained. Think, my Lord,
Power obtained grows to glory,
Life lasting, a permanent possession.
A templed tomb, monument of marble.
Rule over men reckon no madness. ♪

THOMAS. To the man of God what gladness?

TEMPTER. Sadness

Only to those giving love to God alone.
Shall he who held the solid substance
Wander waking with deceitful shadows?
Power is present. Holiness hereafter.

THOMAS. Who then?

TEMPTER. The Chancellor, King and Chancellor.

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King commands. Chancellor richly rules.
This is a sentence not taught in the schools.
To set down the great, protect the poor,
Beneath the throne of God can man do more?
Disarm the ruffian, strengthen the laws,
Rule for the good of the better cause,
Dispensing justice make all even,
Is thrive on earth, and perhaps in heaven.

THOMAS. What means?

TEMPTER. Real power
Is purchased at price of a certain submission.
✓ Your spiritual power is earthly perdition.
Power is present, for him who will wield.

THOMAS. Who shall have it?

TEMPTER. He who will come.

THOMAS. What shall be the month?

TEMPTER. The last from the first.

THOMAS. What shall we give for it?

TEMPTER. Pretence of priestly power.

THOMAS. Why should we give it?

TEMPTER. For the power and the glory.

THOMAS. No!

TEMPTER. Yes! Or bravery will be broken,
Cabined in Canterbury, realmless ruler,
Self-bound servant of a powerless Pope,
The old stag, circled with hounds.

THOMAS. No!

TEMPTER. Yes! men must manœuvre. Monarchs also,
Waging war abroad, need fast friends at home.
✓ Private policy is public profit;
Dignity still shall be dressed with decorum.

THOMAS. You forget the bishops

Whom I have laid under excommunication.

TEMPTER. Hungry hatred

Will not strive against intelligent self-interest.

THOMAS. You forget the barons. Who will not forget
Constant curbing of petty privilege.

TEMPTER. Against the barons

Is King's cause, churl's cause, Chancellor's cause.

THOMAS. No! shall I, who keep the keys

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Of heaven and hell, supreme alone in England,
Who bind and loose, with power from the Pope,
Descend to desire a punier power?
Delegate to deal the doom of damnation,
To condemn kings, not serve among their servants,
Is my open office. No! Go.

TEMPTER. Then I leave you to your fate.

Your sin soars sunward, covering kings' falcons.

THOMAS.^{*} Temporal power, to build a good world,

To keep order, as the world knows order.

✓ Those who put their faith in worldly order

Not controlled by the order of God,

In confident ignorance, but arrest disorder, *but*

Make it fast, breed fatal disease,

Degrade what they exalt.^{*} Power with the King —

I *was* the King, his arm, his better reason.

But what was once exaltation

Would now be only mean descent.

[Enter THIRD TEMPTER]

THIRD TEMPTER. I am an unexpected visitor.

THOMAS.

I expected you.

TEMPTER. But not in this guise, or for my present purpose.

THOMAS. No purpose brings surprise.

TEMPTER.

Well, my Lord,

I am no trifler, and no politician.

To idle or intrigue at court

I have no skill. I am no courtier.

I know a horse, a dog, a wench;

I know how to hold my estates in order,

A country-keeping lord who minds his own business.

It is we country lords who know the country

And we who know what the country needs.

It is our country. We care for the country.

We are the backbone of the nation.

We, not the plotting parasites

About the King. Excuse my bluntness:

I am a rough straightforward Englishman.

THOMAS. Proceed straight forward.

TEMPTER.

Purpose is plain.

Endurance of friendship does not depend

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Upon ourselves, but upon circumstance.
But circumstance is not undetermined.
Unreal friendship may turn to real
But real friendship, once ended, cannot be mended.
Sooner shall enmity turn to alliance.
The enmity that never knew friendship
Can sooner know accord.

THOMAS. For a countryman
You wrap your meaning in as dark generality
As any courtier.

TEMPTER. This is the simple fact!
You have no hope of reconciliation
With Henry the King. You look only
To blind assertion in isolation.
That is a mistake.

THOMAS. O Henry, O my King!

TEMPTER. Other friends
May be found in the present situation.
King in England is not all-powerful;
King is in France, squabbling in Anjou;
Round him waiting hungry sons.
We are for England. We are in England.
You and I, my Lord, are Normans.
England is a land for Norman
Sovereignty. Let the Angevin
Destroy himself, fighting in Anjou.
He does not understand us, the English barons.
We are the people.

THOMAS. To what does this lead?

TEMPTER. To a happy coalition
Of intelligent interests.

THOMAS. But what have you —
If you do speak for barons —

TEMPTER. For a powerful party
Which has turned its eyes in your direction —
To gain from you, your Lordship asks.
For us, Church favour would be an advantage,
Blessing of Pope powerful protection
In the fight for liberty. You, my Lord,
In being with us, would fight a good stroke

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At once, for England and for Rome,
Ending the tyrannous jurisdiction
Of king's court over bishop's court,
Of king's court over baron's court.

THOMAS. Which I helped to found.

TEMPTER. Which you helped to found.

But time past is time forgotten.

We expect the rise of a new constellation.

THOMAS. And if the Archbishop cannot trust the King,
How can he trust those who work for King's undoing?

† TEMPTER. Kings will allow no power but their own;
Church and people have good cause against the throne.

THOMAS. If the Archbishop cannot trust the Throne,
He has good cause to trust none but God alone.

I ruled once as Chancellor

And men like you were glad to wait at my door.

Not only in the court, but in the field

And in the tilt-yard I made many yield.

Shall I who ruled like an eagle over doves

Now take the shape of a wolf among wolves?

Pursue your treacheries as you have done before:

No one shall say that I betrayed a king.

TEMPTER. Then, my Lord, I shall not wait at your door.

And I well hope, before another spring

The King will show his regard for your loyalty.

THOMAS. To make, then break, this thought has come before,

The desperate exercise of failing power.

Samson in Gaza did no more.

But if I break, I must break myself alone.

[Enter FOURTH TEMPTER]

FOURTH TEMPTER. Well done, Thomas, your will is hard to bend.

And with me beside you, you shall not lack a friend.

THOMAS. Who are you? I expected

Three visitors, not four.

TEMPTER. Do not be surprised to receive one more.

Had I been expected, I had been here before.

I always precede expectation.

THOMAS. Who are you?

TEMPTER. As you do not know me, I do not need a name,

And, as you know me, that is why I come.

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You know me, but have never seen my face.

To meet before was never time or place.

THOMAS. Say what you come to say.

TEMPTER.

It shall be said at last.

Hooks have been baited with morsels of the past.

Wantonness is weakness. As for the King,

His hardened hatred shall have no end.

You know truly, the King will never trust

Twice, the man who has been his friend.

Borrow use cautiously, employ

Your services as long as you have to lend.

You would wait for trap to snap

Having served your turn, broken and crushed.

As for barons, envy of lesser men

Is still more stubborn than king's anger.

Kings have public policy, barons private profit,

Jealousy raging possession of the fiend.

Barons are employable against each other ;

Greater enemies must kings destroy.

THOMAS. What is your counsel?

TEMPTER.

Fare forward to the end.

All other ways are closed to you

Except the way already chosen.

But what is pleasure, kingly rule,

Or rule of men beneath a king,

With craft in corners, stealthy stratagem,

To general grasp of spiritual power?

Man oppressed by sin, since Adam fell —

- You hold the keys of heaven and hell.

Power to bind and loose: bind, Thomas, bind,

King and bishop under your heel.

King, emperor, bishop, baron, king:

Uncertain mastery of melting armies,

War, plague, and revolution,

New conspiracies, broken pacts ;

To be master or servant within an hour,

This is the course of temporal power.

The Old King shall know it, when at last breath,

No sons, no empire, he bites broken teeth.

You hold the skein: wind, Thomas, wind

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The thread of eternal life and death.

You hold this power, hold it.

THOMAS. Supreme, in this land?

TEMPTER. Supreme, but for one.

THOMAS. That I do not understand.

TEMPTER. It is not for me to tell you how this may be so ;

I am only here, Thomas, to tell you what you know.

THOMAS. How long shall this be?

TEMPTER. Save what you know already, ask nothing of me.

But think, Thomas, think of glory after death.

When king is dead, there's another king,

And one more king is another reign.

King is forgotten, when another shall come :

Saint and Martyr rule from the tomb.

Think, Thomas, think of enemies dismayed,

Creeping in penance, frightened of a shade ;

Think of pilgrims, standing in line

Before the glittering jewelled shrine,

From generation to generation

Bending the knee in supplication,

Think of the miracles, by God's grace,

And think of your enemies, in another place.

THOMAS. I have thought of these things.

TEMPTER. That is why I tell you.

Your thoughts have more power than kings to compel you.

You have also thought, sometimes at your prayers,

Sometimes hesitating at the angles of stairs,

And between sleep and waking, early in the morning,

When the bird cries, have thought of further scorning.

That nothing lasts, but the wheel turns,

The nest is rifled, and the bird mourns ;

That the shrine shall be pillaged, and the gold spent,

The jewels gone for light ladies' ornament,

The sanctuary broken, and its stores

Swept into the laps of parasites and whores.

When miracles cease, and the faithful desert you.

And men shall only do their best to forget you.

And later is worse, when men will not hate you

Enough to defame or to execrate you,

But pondering the qualities that you lacked

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

Will only try to find the historical fact.

When men shall declare that there was no mystery

About this man who played a certain part in history.

THOMAS. But what is there to do? what is left to be done?

Is there no enduring crown to be won?

TEMPTER. Yes, Thomas, yes; you have thought of that too.

What can compare with glory of Saints

Dwelling forever in presence of God?

What earthly glory, of king or emperor,

What earthly pride, that is not poverty

Compared with richness of heavenly grandeur?

Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest

On earth, to be high in heaven.

And see far off below you, where the gulf is fixed,

Your persecutors, in timeless torment,

Parched passion, beyond expiation.

THOMAS.

No!

Who are you, tempting with my own desires?

Others have come, temporal tempters,

With pleasure and power at palpable price.

What do you offer? what do you ask?

TEMPTER. I offer what you desire. I ask

What you have to give. Is it too much

For such a vision of eternal grandeur?

THOMAS. Others offered real goods, worthless

But real. You only offer

Dreams to damnation.

TEMPTER.

You have often dreamt them.

THOMAS. Is there no way, in my soul's sickness,

Does not lead to damnation in pride?

I well know that these temptations

Mean present vanity and future torment.

Can sinful pride be driven out

Only by more sinful? Can I neither act nor suffer

Without perdition?

TEMPTER. You know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.

You know and do not know, that action is suffering,

And suffering action. Neither does the agent suffer

Nor the patient act. But both are fixed

In an eternal action, an eternal patience

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

To which all must consent that it may be willed
And which all must suffer that they may will it,
That the pattern may subsist, that the wheel may turn and still
Be forever still.

CHORUS. There is no rest in the house. There is no rest in the street.
I hear restless movement of feet. And the air is heavy and thick.
Thick and heavy the sky. And the earth presses up against our feet.
What is the sickly smell, the vapour? the dark green light from a
cloud on a withered tree? The earth is heaving to parturition
of issue of hell. What is the sticky dew that forms on the back
of my hand?

1 THE FOUR TEMPTERS. Man's life is a cheat and a disappointment;
All things are unreal,
Unreal or disappointing:
The Catherine wheel, the pantomime cat,
The prizes given at the children's party,
The prize awarded for the English Essay,
The scholar's degree, the statesman's decoration.
All things become less real, man passes
From unreality to unreality.
This man is obstinate, blind, intent
On self-destruction,
Passing from deception to deception,
From grandeur to grandeur to final illusion,
Lost in the wonder of his own greatness,
The enemy of society, enemy of himself. ✚

THE THREE PRIESTS. O Thomas my Lord do not fight the intractable
tide,

Do not sail the irresistible wind; in the storm,
Should we not wait for the sea to subside, in the night
Abide the coming of day, when the traveller may find his way,
The sailor lay course by the sun?

CHORUS, PRIESTS and TEMPTERS *alternately*.

C. Is it the owl that calls, or a signal between the trees?
P. Is the window-bar made fast, is the door under lock and bolt?
T. Is it rain that taps at the window, is it wind that pokes at the door?
C. Does the torch flame in the hall, the candle in the room?
P. Does the watchman walk by the wall?
T. Does the mastiff prowl by the gate?
C. Death has a hundred hands and walks by a thousand ways.

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- P. He may come in the sight of all, he may pass unseen unheard.
T. Come whispering through the ear, or a sudden shock on the skull.
C. A man may walk with a lamp at night, and yet be drowned in a ditch.
P. A man may climb the stair in the day, and slip on a broken step.
T. A man may sit at meat, and feel the cold in his groin.

CHORUS. We have not been happy, my Lord, we have not been too happy.

We are not ignorant women, we know what we must expect and not expect.

We know of oppression and torture,
We know of extortion and violence,
Destitution, disease,
The old without fire in winter,
The child without milk in summer,
Our labour taken away from us,
Our sins made heavier upon us.
We have seen the young man mutilated,
The torn girl trembling by the mill-stream.
And meanwhile we have gone on living,
Living and partly living,
Picking together the pieces,
Gathering faggots at nightfall,
Building a partial shelter,
For sleeping, and eating and drinking and laughter.

God gave us always some reason, some hope; but now a new terror
has soiled us, which none can avert, none can avoid, flowing
under our feet and over the sky;

Under doors and down chimneys, flowing in at the ear and the
mouth and the eye.

God is leaving us, God is leaving us, more pang, more pain than
birth or death.

- ✧ Sweet and cloying through the dark air
Falls the stifling scent of despair;
The forms take shape in the dark air:
Puss-purr of leopard, footfall of padding bear,
Palm-pat of nodding ape, square hyaena waiting
For laughter, laughter, laughter. ✧ The Lords of Hell are here.
They curl round you, lie at your feet, swing and wing through the
dark air.

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O Thomas Archbishop, save us, save us, save yourself that we may
be saved;

Destroy yourself and we are destroyed.

THOMAS. Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain:

Temptation shall not come in this kind again.

The last temptation is the greatest treason:

To do the right deed for the wrong reason.

The natural vigour in the venial sin

Is the way in which our lives begin.

Thirty years ago, I searched all the ways

That lead to pleasure, advancement and praise.

Delight in sense, in learning and in thought,

Music and philosophy, curiosity,

The purple bullfinch in the lilac tree,

The tiltyard skill, the strategy of chess,

Love in the garden, singing to the instrument,

Were all things equally desirable.

* Ambition comes when early force is spent

And when we find no longer all things possible.

Ambition comes behind and unobservable.

Sin grows with doing good. When I imposed the King's law

In England, and waged war with him against Toulouse,

I beat the barons at their own game. I

Could then despise the men who thought me most contemptible,

The raw nobility, whose manners matched their finger-nails.

While I ate out of the King's dish

To become servant of God was never my wish.

Servant of God has chance of greater sin

And sorrow, than the man who serves a king.

For those who serve the greater cause may make the cause serve
them,

Still doing right: and striving with political men

May make that cause political, not by what they do,

But by what they are. I know

What yet remains to show you of my history

Will seem to most of you at best futility,

Senseless self-slaughter of a lunatic,

Arrogant passion of a fanatic.

I know that history at all times draws

The strangest consequence from remotest cause.

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But for every evil, every sacrilege,
Crime, wrong, oppression and the axe's edge,
Indifference, exploitation, you, and you,
And you, must all be punished. So must you.
I shall no longer act or suffer, to the sword's end.
Now my good Angel, whom God appoints
To be my guardian, hover over the swords' points.

Interlude

THE ARCHBISHOP

preaches in the Cathedral on Christmas Morning, 1170

'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.' *The fourteenth verse of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Saint Luke.* In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dear children of God, my sermon this Christmas morning will be a very short one. I wish only that you should meditate in your hearts the deep meaning and mystery of our masses of Christmas Day. For whenever Mass is said, we re-enact the Passion and Death of Our Lord; and on this Christmas Day we do this in celebration of His Birth. So that at the same moment we rejoice in His coming for the salvation of men, and offer again to God His Body and Blood in sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. It was in this same night that has just passed, that a multitude of the heavenly host appeared before the shepherds at Bethlehem, saying 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will'; at this same time of all the year that we celebrate at once the Birth of Our Lord and His Passion and Death upon the Cross. Beloved, as the World sees, this is to behave in a strange fashion. For who in the World will both mourn and rejoice at once and for the same reason? For either joy will be overborne by mourning, or mourning will be cast out by joy; so it is only in these our Christian mysteries that we can rejoice and mourn at once for the same reason. Now think for a moment about the meaning of this word 'peace'. Does it seem strange to you that the angels should have announced Peace, when ceaselessly the world has been stricken with War and the fear of War? Does it seem to you that the angelic voices were mistaken, and that the promise was a disappointment and a cheat?

Reflect now, how Our Lord Himself spoke of Peace. He said to His disciples, 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.' Did He mean peace as we think of it: the kingdom of England at peace with its neighbours, the barons at peace with the King, the householder counting over his peaceful gains, the swept hearth, his best wine for a friend

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at the table, his wife singing to the children? Those men His disciples knew no such things: they went forth to journey afar, to suffer by land and sea, to know torture, imprisonment, disappointment, to suffer death by martyrdom. What then did He mean? If you ask that, remember then that He said also, 'Not as the world gives, give I unto you.' So then, He gave to His disciples peace, but not peace as the world gives.

Consider also one thing of which you have probably never thought. Not only do we at the feast of Christmas celebrate at once Our Lord's Birth and His Death: but on the next day we celebrate the martyrdom of His first martyr, the blessed Stephen. Is it an accident, do you think, that the day of the first martyr follows immediately the day of the Birth of Christ? By no means. Just as we rejoice and mourn at once, in the Birth and in the Passion of Our Lord; so also, in a smaller figure, we both rejoice and mourn in the death of martyrs. We mourn, for the sins of the world that has martyred them; we rejoice, that another soul is numbered among the Saints in Heaven, for the glory of God and for the salvation of men.

✕ Beloved, we do not think of a martyr simply as a good Christian who has been killed because he is a Christian: for that would be solely to mourn. We do not think of him simply as a good Christian who has been elevated to the company of the Saints: for that would be simply to rejoice: and neither our mourning nor our rejoicing is as the world's is. A Christian martyrdom is never an accident, for Saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effect of a man's will to become a Saint, as a man by willing and contriving may become a ruler of men. A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. It is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr. So thus as on earth the Church mourns and rejoices at once, in a fashion that the world cannot understand; so in Heaven the Saints are most high, having made themselves most low, and are seen, not as we see them, but in the light of the Godhead from which they draw their being. ✕

I have spoken to you to-day, dear children of God, of the martyrs of the past, asking you to remember especially our martyr of Canterbury, the blessed Archbishop Elphege; because it is fitting, on Christ's birth day, to remember what is that Peace which He brought; and because,

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dear children, I do not think I shall ever preach to you again; and because it is possible that in a short time you may have yet another martyr, and that one perhaps not the last. I would have you keep in your hearts these words that I say, and think of them at another time. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Part II

CHORUS. Does the bird sing in the South?

Only the sea-bird cries, driven inland by the storm.

What sign of the spring of the year?

Only the death of the old: not a stir, not a shoot, not a breath.

Do the days begin to lengthen?

Longer and darker the day, shorter and colder the night.

Still and stifling the air: but a wind is stored up in the East.

The starved crow sits in the field, attentive; and in the wood

The owl rehearses the hollow note of death.

What signs of a bitter spring?

The wind stored up in the East.

What, at the time of the birth of Our Lord, at Christmastide,

Is there not peace upon earth, goodwill among men?

The peace of this world is always uncertain, unless men keep the
peace of God.

And war among men defiles this world, but death in the Lord
renews it,

And the world must be cleaned in the winter, or we shall have
only

A sour spring, a parched summer, an empty harvest.

Between Christmas and Easter what work shall be done?

The ploughman shall go out in March and turn the same earth

He has turned before, the bird shall sing the same song.

When the leaf is out on the tree, when the elder and may

Burst over the stream, and the air is clear and high,

And voices trill at windows, and children tumble in front of the
door,

What work shall have been done, what wrong

Shall the bird's song cover, the green tree cover, what wrong

Shall the fresh earth cover? We wait, and the time is short

But waiting is long.

[Enter the FIRST PRIEST with a banner of St. Stephen borne before him.

The lines sung are in italics.]

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FIRST PRIEST. Since Christmas a day: and the day of St. Stephen, First
Martyr. *St. Christ.*

Princes moreover did sit, and did witness falsely against me.

A day that was always most dear to the Archbishop Thomas.

And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice:

Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.

Princes moreover did sit.

[*Introit of St. Stephen is heard*]

[*Enter the SECOND PRIEST, with a banner of St. John the Apostle borne before him.*]

SECOND PRIEST. Since St. Stephen a day: and the day of St. John the
Apostle.

In the midst of the congregation he opened his mouth.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard,

Which we have seen with our eyes, and our hands have handled

Of the word of life; that which we have seen and heard

Declare we unto you.

In the midst of the congregation.

[*Introit of St. John is heard*]

[*Enter the THIRD PRIEST, with a banner of the Holy Innocents borne before him.*]

THIRD PRIEST. Since St. John the Apostle a day: and the day of the
Holy Innocents.

Out of the mouth of very babes, O God.

As the voice of many waters, of thunder, of harps,

They sung as it were a new song.

The blood of thy saints have they shed like water,

And there was no man to bury them. Avenge, O Lord,

The blood of thy saints. In Rama, a voice heard, weeping.

Out of the mouth of very babes, O God!

[*THE PRIESTS stand together with the banners behind them*]

FIRST PRIEST. Since the Holy Innocents a day: the fourth day from
Christmas.

THE THREE PRIESTS. *Rejoice we all, keeping holy day.*

FIRST PRIEST. As for the people, so also for himself, he offereth
for sins.

✓ *He lays down his life for the sheep.*

THE THREE PRIESTS. *Rejoice we all, keeping holy day.*

FIRST PRIEST.

To-day?

SECOND PRIEST. To-day, what is to-day? For the day is half gone.

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FIRST PRIEST. To-day, what is to-day? but another day, the dusk of the year.

SECOND PRIEST. To-day, what is to-day? Another night, and another dawn.

THIRD PRIEST. What day is the day that we know that we hope for or fear for?

Every day is the day we should fear from or hope from. One moment

Weights like another. Only in retrospection, selection,

We say, that was the day. The critical moment

That is always now, and here. Even now, in sordid particulars

The eternal design may appear.

[*Enter the FOUR KNIGHTS. The banners disappear*]

FIRST KNIGHT. Servants of the King.

FIRST PRIEST. And known to us.

You are welcome. Have you ridden far?

FIRST KNIGHT. Not far to-day, but matters urgent

Have brought us from France. We rode hard,

Took ship yesterday, landed last night,

Having business with the Archbishop.

SECOND KNIGHT. Urgent business.

THIRD KNIGHT. From the King.

SECOND KNIGHT. By the King's order.

FIRST KNIGHT. Our men are outside.

FIRST PRIEST. You know the Archbishop's hospitality.

We are about to go to dinner.

The good Archbishop would be vexed

If we did not offer you entertainment

Before your business. Please dine with us.

Your men shall be looked after also.

Dinner before business. Do you like roast pork?

FIRST KNIGHT. Business before dinner. We will roast your pork

First, and dine upon it after.

SECOND KNIGHT. We must see the Archbishop.

THIRD KNIGHT. Go, tell the Archbishop

We have no need of his hospitality.

We will find our own dinner.

FIRST PRIEST [*to attendant*]. Go, tell His Lordship.

FOURTH KNIGHT. How much longer will you keep us waiting?

[*Enter THOMAS*]

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THOMAS [to PRIESTS]. However certain our expectation
The moment foreseen may be unexpected
When it arrives. It comes when we are
Engrossed with matters of other urgency.
On my table you will find
The papers in order, and the documents signed.
[To KNIGHTS]. You are welcome, whatever your business may be.
You say, from the King?

FIRST KNIGHT. Most surely from the King.
We must speak with you alone.

THOMAS [to PRIESTS] Leave us then alone.
Now what is the matter?

FIRST KNIGHT. This is the matter.

THE THREE KNIGHTS. You are the Archbishop in revolt against the
King; in rebellion to the King and the law of the land;
You are the Archbishop who was made by the King; whom he set
in your place to carry out his command.
You are his servant, his tool, and his jack,
You wore his favours on your back,
You had your honours all from his hand; from him you had the
power, the seal and the ring.
This is the man who was the tradesman's son: the backstairs brat
who was born in Cheapside;
This is the creature that crawled upon the King; swollen with
blood and swollen with pride.
Creeping out of the London dirt,
Crawling up like a louse on your shirt,
The man who cheated, swindled, lied; broke his oath and betrayed
his King.

THOMAS. This is not true.
Both before and after I received the ring
I have been a loyal subject to the King.
Saying my order, I am at his command,
As his most faithful vassal in the land.

FIRST KNIGHT. Saving your order! let your order save you —
As I do not think it is like to do.
Saving your ambition is what you mean,
Saving your pride, envy and spleen.

SECOND KNIGHT. Saving your insolence and greed.
Won't you ask us to pray to God for you, in your need?

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THIRD KNIGHT. Yes, we'll pray for you!

FIRST KNIGHT. Yes, we'll pray for you!

THE THREE KNIGHTS. Yes, we'll pray that God may help you!

THOMAS. But, gentlemen, your business

Which you said so urgent, is it only

Scolding and blaspheming?

FIRST KNIGHT. That was only

Our indignation, as loyal subjects.

THOMAS. Loyal? to whom?

FIRST KNIGHT. To the King!

SECOND KNIGHT. The King!

THIRD KNIGHT. The King!

THE THREE KNIGHTS. God bless him!

THOMAS. Then let your new coat of loyalty be worn

Carefully, so it get not soiled or torn.

Have you something to say?

FIRST KNIGHT. By the King's command.

Shall we say it now?

SECOND KNIGHT. Without delay,

Before the old fox is off and away.

THOMAS. What you have to say

By the King's command — if it be the King's command —

Should be said in public. If you make charges,

Then in public I will refute them.

FIRST KNIGHT. No! here and now!

[*They make to attack him, but the priests and attendants return and quietly interpose themselves.*]

THOMAS. Now and here!

FIRST KNIGHT. Of your earlier misdeeds I shall make no mention.

They are too well known. But after dissension

Had ended, in France, and you were endued

With your former privilege, how did you show your gratitude?

You had fled from England, not exiled

Or threatened, mind you; but in the hope

Of stirring up trouble in the French dominions.

You sowed strife abroad, you reviled

The King to the King of France, to the Pope,

Raising up against him false opinions.

SECOND KNIGHT. Yet the King, out of his charity,

And urged by your friends, offered clemency,

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Made a pact of peace, and all dispute ended
Sent you back to your See as you demanded.

THIRD KNIGHT. And burying the memory of your transgressions
Restored your honours and your possessions.
All was granted for which you sued:

Yet how, I repeat, did you show your gratitude?

✓FIRST KNIGHT. ✓Suspending those who had crowned the young prince,
✓Denying the legality of his coronation. *King!*

SECOND KNIGHT. Binding with the chains of anathema.

THIRD KNIGHT. Using every means in your power to evince
The King's faithful servants, every one who transacts
His business in his absence, the business of the nation.

FIRST KNIGHT. These are the facts.

Say therefore if you will be content

To answer in the King's presence. Therefore were we sent.

THOMAS. Never was it my wish

To uncrown the King's son, or to diminish

His honour and power. Why should he wish

To deprive my people of me and keep me from my own

And bid me sit in Canterbury, alone?

I would wish him three crowns rather than one,

And as for the bishops, it is not my yoke

That is laid upon them, or mine to revoke.

Let them go to the Pope. It was he who condemned them.

FIRST KNIGHT. Through you they were suspended.

SECOND KNIGHT. By you be this amended.

THIRD KNIGHT. Absolve them.

FIRST KNIGHT. Absolve them.

THOMAS. I do not deny

That this was done through me. But it is not I

Who can loose whom the Pope has bound.

Let them go to him, upon whom redounds

Their contempt towards me, their contempt towards the Church
shown.

FIRST KNIGHT. Be that as it may, here is the King's command:

✓That you and your servants depart from this land.

THOMAS. If that *is* the King's command, I will be bold

To say: seven years were my people without

My presence; seven years of misery and pain.

Seven years a mendicant on foreign charity

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I lingered abroad: seven years is no brevity.

I shall not get those seven years back again.

Never again, you must make no doubt,

Shall the sea run between the shepherd and his fold.

FIRST KNIGHT. The King's justice, the King's majesty,

You insult with gross indignity;

Insolent madman, whom nothing deters

From attainting his servants and ministers.

† THOMAS. It is not I who insult the King,

And there is higher than I or the King.

It is not I, Becket from Cheapside,

It is not against me, Becket, that you strive.

It is not Becket who pronounces doom, /

But the Law of Christ's Church, the judgement of Rome. †

FIRST KNIGHT. Priest, you have spoken in peril of your life.

SECOND KNIGHT. Priest, you have spoken in danger of the knife.

THIRD KNIGHT. Priest, you have spoken treachery and treason.

THE THREE KNIGHTS. Priest! traitor, confirmed in malfeasance.

THOMAS. I submit my cause to the judgement of Rome.

But if you kill me, I shall rise from my tomb

To submit my cause before God's throne.

[Exit]

FOURTH KNIGHT. Priest! monk! and servant! take, hold, detain,

Restrain this man, in the King's name.

FIRST KNIGHT. Or answer with your bodies.

SECOND KNIGHT.

Enough of words.

THE FOUR KNIGHTS. We come for the King's justice, we come with
swords.

[Exeunt]

CHORUS. I have smelt them, the death-bringers, senses are quickened

By subtle forebodings; I have heard

Fluting in the night-time, fluting and owls, have seen at noon

Scaly wings slanting over, huge and ridiculous. I have tasted

The savour of putrid flesh in the spoon. I have felt

The heaving of earth at nightfall, restless, absurd. I have heard

Laughter in the noises of beasts that make strange noises: jackal,

jackass, jackdaw; the scurrying noise of mouse and jerboa; the

laugh of the loon, the lunatic bird. I have seen

Grey necks twisting, rat tails twining, in the thick light of dawn. I
have eaten

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Smooth creatures still living, with the strong salt taste of living
things under the sea; I have tasted

The living lobster, the crab, the oyster, the whelk and the prawn;
and they live and spawn in my bowels, and my bowels dissolve
in the light of dawn. I have smelt

Death in the rose, death in the hollyhock, sweet pea, hyacinth,
primrose and cowslip. I have seen

Trunk and horn, tusk and hoof, in odd places;

I have lain on the floor of the sea and breathed with the breathing
of the sea-anemone, swallowed with ingurgitation of the
sponge. I have lain in the soil and criticised the worm. In the
air

Flirted with the passage of the kite, I have plunged with the kite
and cowered with the wren. I have felt

The horn of the beetle, the scale of the viper, the mobile hard
insensitive skin of the elephant, the evasive flank of the fish.

I have smelt

Corruption in the dish, incense in the latrine, the sewer in the
incense, the smell of sweet soap in the woodpath, a hellish
sweet scent in the woodpath, while the ground heaved. I have
seen

Rings of light coiling downwards, descending

To the horror of the ape. Have I not known, not known

What was coming to be? It was here, in the kitchen, in the passage,

In the mews in the barn in the byre in the market-place

In our veins our bowels our skulls as well

As well as in the plottings of potentates

As well as in the consultations of powers.

What is woven on the loom of fate

What is woven in the councils of princes

Is woven also in our veins, our brains,

Is woven like a pattern of living worms

In the guts of the women of Canterbury.

I have smelt them, the death-bringers; now is too late

For action, too soon for contrition.

Nothing is possible but the shamed swoon

Of those consenting to the last humiliation.

I have consented, Lord Archbishop, have consented.

Am torn away, subdued, violated,

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United to the spiritual flesh of nature,
Mastered by the animal powers of spirit,
Dominated by the lust of self-demolition,
By the final utter uttermost death of spirit,
By the final ecstasy of waste and shame,
O Lord Archbishop, O Thomas Archbishop, forgive us, forgive us,
pray for us that we may pray for you, out of our shame.

[Enter THOMAS]

† THOMAS. Peace, and be at peace with your thoughts and visions.
These things had to come to you and you to accept them,
This is your share of the eternal burden,
The perpetual glory. This is one moment,
But know that another
Shall pierce you with a sudden painful joy
When the figure of God's purpose is made complete.
You shall forget these things, toiling in the household,
You shall remember them, droning by the fire,
When age and forgetfulness sweeten memory
Only like a dream that has often been told
And often been changed in the telling. They will seem unreal.
Human kind cannot bear very much reality. †

[Enter PRIESTS]

PRIESTS [*severally*]. My Lord, you must not stop here. To the minster.
Through the cloister. No time to waste. They are coming back,
armed. To the altar, to the altar.

† THOMAS. All my life they have been coming, these feet. All my life
I have waited. Death will come only when I am worthy,
And if I am worthy, there is no danger. †
I have therefore only to make perfect my will.

PRIESTS. My Lord, they are coming. They will break through
presently.

You will be killed. Come to the altar.
Make haste, my Lord. Don't stop here talking. It is not right.
What shall become of us, my Lord, if you are killed;
what shall become of us?

THOMAS. Peace! be quiet! remember where you are, and what is
happening;
No life here is sought for but mine,
And I am not in danger: only near to death.

PRIESTS. My Lord, to vespers! You must not be absent from vespers.

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

You must not be absent from the divine office. To vespers.
Into the Cathedral!

THOMAS. Go to vespers, remember me at your prayers.

They shall find the shepherd here; the flock shall be spared.

I have had a tremor of bliss, a wink of heaven, a whisper,

And I would no longer be denied; all things

Proceed to a joyful consummation. ✕

PRIESTS. Seize him! force him! drag him!

THOMAS. Keep your hands off!

PRIESTS. To vespers! Hurry.

[*They drag him off. While the CHORUS speak, the scene is changed to the cathedral.*]

CHORUS [*while a Dies Iræ is sung in Latin by a choir in the distance*].

Numb the hand and dry the eyelid,

Still the horror, but more horror

Than when tearing in the belly.

Still the horror, but more horror

Than when twisting in the fingers,

Than when splitting in the skull.

More than footfall in the passage,

More than shadow in the doorway,

More than fury in the hall.

The agents of hell disappear, the human, they shrink and dissolve

Into dust on the wind, forgotten, unmemorable; only is here

The white flat face of Death, God's silent servant,

And behind the face of Death the Judgement

And behind the Judgement the Void, more horrid than active
shapes of hell;

Emptiness, absence, separation from God;

The horror of the effortless journey, to the empty land

Which is no land, only emptiness, absence, the Void,

Where those who were men can no longer turn the mind

To distraction, delusion, escape into dream, pretence,

Where the soul is no longer deceived, for there are no objects, no
tones,

No colours, no forms to distract, to divert the soul

From seeing itself, foully united forever, nothing with nothing,

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

Not what we call death, but what beyond death is not death,
We fear, we fear. Who shall then plead for me,
Who intercede for me, in my most need?

Dead upon the tree, my Saviour,
Let not be in vain Thy labour;
Help me, Lord, in my last fear.

Dust I am, to dust am bending,
From the final doom impending
Help me, Lord, for death is near.

[In the cathedral. THOMAS and PRIESTS]

PRIESTS. Bar the door. Bar the door

The door is barred.

We are safe. We are safe.

They dare not break in.

They cannot break in. They have not the force.

We are safe. We are safe.

THOMAS. Unbar the doors! throw open the doors!

I will not have the house of prayer, the church of Christ,

The sanctuary, turned into a fortress.

The Church shall protect her own, in her own way, not

As oak and stone; stone and oak decay,

Give no stay, but the Church shall endure.

The Church shall be open, even to our enemies. Open the door!

PRIESTS. My Lord! these are not men, these come not as men come, but

Like maddened beasts. They come not like men, who

Respect the sanctuary, who kneel to the Body of Christ,

But like beasts. You would bar the door

Against the lion, the leopard, the wolf or the boar,

Why not more

Against beasts with the souls of damned men, against men

Who would damn themselves to beasts. My Lord! My Lord!

THOMAS. You think me reckless, desperate and mad.

You argue by results, as this world does,

To settle if an act be good or bad.

You defer to the fact. For every life and every act

Consequence of good and evil can be shown.

* And as in time results of many deeds are blended

So good and evil in the end become confounded. *

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

It is not in time that my death shall be known ;

It is out of time that my decision is taken

If you call that decision

To which my whole being gives entire consent.

I give my life

To the Law of God above the Law of Man.

Unbar the door ! unbar the door !

We are not here to triumph by fighting, by stratagem, or by
resistance,

Not to fight with beasts as men. We have fought the beast

And have conquered. We have only to conquer

Now, by suffering. This is the easier victory.

Now is the triumph of the Cross, now

Open the door ! I command it. OPEN THE DOOR !

[*The door is opened. The KNIGHTS enter, slightly tipsy*]

PRIESTS. This way, my Lord ! Quick. Up the stair. To the roof.

To the crypt. Quick. Come. Force him.

KNIGHTS. Where is Becket, the traitor to the King ?

Where is Becket, the meddling priest ?

Come down Daniel to the lions' den,

Come down Daniel for the mark of the beast.

Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb ?

Are you marked with the mark of the beast ?

Come down Daniel to the lions' den,

Come down Daniel and join in the feast.

Where is Becket the Cheapside brat ?

Where is Becket the faithless priest ?

Come down Daniel to the lions' den,

Come down Daniel and join in the feast.

THOMAS. It is the just man who

Like a bold lion, should be without fear.

I am here.

No traitor to the King. I am a priest,

A Christian, saved by the blood of Christ,

Ready to suffer with my blood.

This is the sign of the Church always,

The sign of blood : Blood for blood.

His blood given to buy my life,

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

My blood given to pay for His death,

My death for His death. /

FIRST KNIGHT. Absolve all those you have excommunicated.

SECOND KNIGHT. Resign the powers you have arrogated. ✓

THIRD KNIGHT. Restore to the King the money you appropriated.

FIRST KNIGHT. Renew the obedience you have violated. ✓

THOMAS. For my Lord I am now ready to die,

That his Church may have peace and liberty.

Do with me as you will, to your hurt and shame;

But none of my people, in God's name,

Whether layman or clerk, shall you touch.

This I forbid.

KNIGHTS. Traitor! traitor! traitor!

THOMAS. You, Reginald, three times traitor you:

Traitor to me as my temporal vassal,

Traitor to me as your spiritual lord,

Traitor to God in desecrating His Church.

FIRST KNIGHT. No faith do I owe to a renegade,

And what I owe shall now be paid.

THOMAS. Now to Almighty God, to the Blessed Mary ever Virgin, to the blessed John the Baptist, the holy apostles Peter and Paul, to the blessed martyr Denys, and to all the Saints, I commend my cause and that of the Church.

While the KNIGHTS kill him, we hear the

CHORUS. Clear the air! clean the sky! wash the wind! take stone from stone and wash them.

The land is foul, the water is foul, our beasts and ourselves defiled with blood.

A rain of blood has blinded my eyes. Where is England? where is Kent? where is Canterbury?

O far far far far in the past; and I wander in a land of barren boughs: if I break them, they bleed; I wander in a land of dry stones: if I touch them they bleed.

How how can I ever return, to the soft quiet seasons?

Night stay with us, stop sun, hold season, let the day not come, let the spring not come.

Can I look again at the day and its common things, and see them all smeared with blood, through a curtain of falling blood?

We did not wish anything to happen.

We understood the private catastrophe,

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL

The personal loss, the general misery,
Living and partly living;
The terror by night that ends in daily action,
The terror by day that ends in sleep;
But the talk in the market-place, the hand on the broom,
The night-time heaping of the ashes,
The fuel laid on the fire at daybreak,
These acts marked a limit to our suffering.
Every horror had its definition,
Every sorrow had a kind of end:
In life there is not time to grieve long.
But this, this is out of life, this is out of time,
An instant eternity of evil and wrong.
We are soiled by a filth that we cannot clean, united to supernatural
vermin,
It is not we alone, it is not the house, it is not the city that is defiled,
But the world that is wholly foul.
Clear the air! clean the sky! wash the wind! take the stone from the
stone, take the skin from the arm, take the muscle from the
bone, and wash them. Wash the stone, wash the bone, wash the
brain, wash the soul, wash them wash them!

[*The KNIGHTS, having completed the murder, advance to the front of the stage and address the audience.*]

FIRST KNIGHT. We beg you to give us your attention for a few moments. We know that you may be disposed to judge unfavourably of our action. You are Englishmen, and therefore you believe in fair play: and when you see one man being set upon by four, then your sympathies are all with the under dog. I respect such feelings, I share them. Nevertheless, I appeal to your sense of honour. You are Englishmen, and therefore will not judge anybody without hearing both sides of the case. That is in accordance with our long-established principle of Trial by Jury. I am not myself qualified to put our case to you. I am a man of action and not of words. For that reason I shall do no more than introduce the other speakers, who, with their various abilities, and different points of view, will be able to lay before you the merits of this extremely complex problem. I shall call upon our eldest member to speak first, my neighbour in the country: Baron William de Traci.

THIRD KNIGHT. I am afraid I am not anything like such an experienced speaker as my old friend Reginald Fitz Urse would lead you to

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believe. But there is one thing I should like to say, and I might as well say it at once. It is this: in what we have done, and whatever you may think of it, we have been perfectly disinterested. [*The other KNIGHTS: 'Hear! hear!'*] *We* are not getting anything out of this. We have much more to lose than to gain. We are four plain Englishmen who put our country first. I dare say that we didn't make a very good impression when we came in just now. The fact is that we knew we had taken on a pretty stiff job; I'll only speak for myself, but I had drunk a good deal — I am not a drinking man ordinarily — to brace myself up for it. When you come to the point, it does go against the grain to kill an Archbishop, especially when you have been brought up in good Church traditions. So if we seemed a bit rowdy, you will understand why it was; and for my part I am awfully sorry about it. We realised this ~~was~~ our duty, but all the same we had to work ourselves up to it. And, as I said, *we* are not getting a penny out of this. We know perfectly well how things will turn out. King Henry — God bless him — will have to say, for reasons of state, that he never meant this to happen; and there is going to be an awful row; and at the best we shall have to spend the rest of our lives abroad. And even when reasonable people come to see that the Archbishop *had* to be put out of the way — and personally I had a tremendous admiration for him — you must have noted what a good show he put up at the end — they won't give *us* any glory. No, we have done for ourselves, there's no mistake about that. So, as I said at the beginning, please give us at least the credit for being completely disinterested in this business. I think that is about all I have to say.

FIRST KNIGHT. I think we will all agree that William de Traci has spoken well and has made a very important point. The gist of his argument is this: that we have been completely disinterested. But our act itself needs more justification than that; and you must hear our other speakers. I shall next call upon Hugh de Morville, who has made a special study of statecraft and constitutional law. Sir Hugh de Morville.

SECOND KNIGHT. I should like first to recur to a point that was very well put by our leader, Reginald Fitz Urse: that you are Englishmen, and therefore your sympathies are always with the under dog. It is the English spirit of fair play. Now the worthy Archbishop, whose good qualities I very much admired, has throughout been presented as the under dog. But is this really the case? I am going

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to appeal not to your emotions but to your reason. You are hard-headed sensible people, as I can see, and not to be taken in by emotional clap-trap. I therefore ask you to consider soberly: what were the Archbishop's aims? and what are King Henry's aims? In the answer to these questions lies the key to the problem.

The King's aim has been perfectly consistent. During the reign of the late Queen Matilda and the irruption of the unhappy usurper Stephen, the kingdom was very much divided. Our King saw that the one thing needful was to restore order: to curb the excessive powers of local government, which were usually exercised for selfish and often for seditious ends, and to reform the legal system. He therefore intended that Becket, who had proved himself an extremely able administrator — no one denies that — should unite the offices of Chancellor and Archbishop. Had Becket concurred with the King's wishes, we should have had an almost ideal State: a union of spiritual and temporal administration, under the central government. I knew Becket well, in various official relations; and I may say that I have never known a man so well qualified for the highest rank of the Civil Service. And what happened? The moment that Becket, at the King's instance, had been made Archbishop, he resigned the office of Chancellor, he became more priestly than the priests, he ostentatiously and offensively adopted an ascetic manner of life, he affirmed immediately that there was a higher order than that which our King, and he as the King's servant, had for so many years striven to establish; and that — God knows why — the two orders were incompatible.

You will agree with me that such interference by an Archbishop offends the instincts of a people like ours. So far, I know that I have your approval: I read it in your faces. It is only with the measures we have had to adopt, in order to set matters to rights, that you take issue. No one regrets the necessity for violence more than we do. Unhappily, there are times when violence is the only way in which social justice can be secured. At another time, you would condemn an Archbishop by vote of Parliament and execute him formally as a traitor, and no one would have to bear the burden of being called murderer. And at a later time still, even such temperate measures as these would become unnecessary. But, if you have now arrived at a just subordination of the pretensions of the Church to the welfare of the State, remember that it is we who took the first step. We have been instrumental in bringing about the state of

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affairs that you approve. We have served your interests; we merit your applause; and if there is any guilt whatever in the matter, you must share it with us.

FIRST KNIGHT. Morville has given us a great deal to think about. It seems to me that he has said almost the last word, for those who have been able to follow his very subtle reasoning. We have, however, one more speaker, who has I think another point of view to express. If there are any who are still unconvinced, I think that Richard Brito, coming as he does of a family distinguished for its loyalty to the Church, will be able to convince them. Richard Brito.

FOURTH KNIGHT. The speakers who have preceded me, to say nothing of our leader, Reginald Fitz Urse, have all spoken very much to the point. I have nothing to add along their particular lines of argument. What I have to say may be put in the form of a question: *Who killed the Archbishop?* As you have been eye-witnesses of this lamentable scene, you may feel some surprise at my putting it in this way. But consider the course of events. I am obliged, very briefly, to go over the ground traversed by the last speaker. While the late Archbishop was Chancellor, no one, under the King, did more to weld the country together, to give it the unity, the stability, order, tranquillity, and justice that it so badly needed. From the moment he became Archbishop, he completely reversed his policy; he showed himself to be utterly indifferent to the fate of the country, to be, in fact, a monster of egotism. This egotism grew upon him, until it became at last an undoubted mania. I have unimpeachable evidence to the effect that before he left France he clearly prophesied, in the presence of numerous witnesses, that he had not long to live, and that he would be killed in England. He used every means of provocation; from his conduct, step by step, there can be no inference except that he had determined upon a death by martyrdom. Even at the last, he could have given us reason: you have seen how he evaded our questions. And when he had deliberately exasperated us beyond human endurance, he could still have easily escaped; he could have kept himself from us long enough to allow our righteous anger to cool. That was just what he did not wish to happen; he insisted, while we were still inflamed with wrath, that the doors should be opened. Need I say more? I think, with these facts before you, you will unhesitatingly render a verdict of Suicide while of Unsound Mind. It is the only charitable verdict you can give, upon one who was, after all, a great man.

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FIRST KNIGHT. Thank you, Brito, I think that there is no more to be said; and I suggest that you now disperse quietly to your homes. Please be careful not to loiter in groups at street corners, and do nothing that might provoke any public outbreak.

[*Exeunt KNIGHTS*]

FIRST PRIEST. O father, father, gone from us, lost to us,
How shall we find you, from what far place
Do you look down on us? You now in Heaven,
Who shall now guide us, protect us, direct us?
After what journey through what further dread
Shall we recover your presence? when inherit
Your strength? The Church lies bereft,
Alone, desecrated, desolated, and the heathen shall build on the
ruins,
Their world without God. I see it. I see it.

THIRD PRIEST. No. For the Church is stronger for this action,
Triumphant in adversity. It is fortified
By persecution: supreme, so long as men will die for it.
Go, weak sad men, lost erring souls, homeless in earth or heaven.
Go where the sunset reddens the last grey rock
Of Brittany, or the Gates of Hercules.
Go venture shipwreck on the sullen coasts
Where blackamoors make captive Christian men;
Go to the northern seas confined with ice
Where the dead breath makes numb the hand, makes dull the brain;
Find an oasis in the desert sun,
Go seek alliance with the heathen Saracen,
To share his filthy rites, and try to snatch
Forgetfulness in his libidinous courts,
Oblivion in the fountain by the date-tree;
Or sit and bite your nails in Aquitaine.
In the small circle of pain within the skull
You still shall tramp and tread one endless round
Of thought, to justify your action to yourselves,
Weaving a fiction which unravels as you weave,
Pacing forever in the hell of make-believe
Which never is belief: this is your fate on earth
And we must think no further of you.

FIRST PRIEST. O my lord
The glory of whose new state is hidden from us,

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Pray for us of your charity.

SECOND PRIEST.

Now in the sight of God

Conjoined with all the saints and martyrs gone before you,
Remember us.

THIRD PRIEST. Let our thanks ascend

To God, who has given us another Saint in Canterbury.

CHORUS [*while a Te Deum is sung in Latin by a choir in the distance*].

We praise Thee, O God, for Thy glory displayed in all the
creatures of the earth,

In the snow, in the rain, in the wind, in the storm; in all of Thy
creatures, both the hunters and the hunted.

For all things exist only as seen by Thee, only as known by Thee,
all things exist

Only in Thy light, and Thy glory is declared even in that which
denies Thee; the darkness declares the glory of light.

Those who deny Thee could not deny, if Thou didst not exist; and
their denial is never complete, for if it were so, they would not
exist.

They affirm Thee in living; all things affirm Thee in living; the
bird in the air, both the hawk and the finch; the beast on the
earth, both the wolf and the lamb; the worm in the soil and the
worm in the belly.

* Therefore man, whom Thou hast made to be conscious of Thee,
must consciously praise Thee, in thought and in word and in
deed.

Even with the hand to the broom, the back bent in laying the fire,
the knee bent in cleaning the hearth, we, the scrubbers and
sweepers of Canterbury,

The back bent under toil, the knee bent under sin, the hands to the
face under fear, the head bent under grief,

Even in us the voices of seasons, the snuffle of winter, the song of
spring, the drone of summer, the voices of beasts and of birds,
praise Thee.

✓ We thank Thee for Thy mercies of blood, for Thy redemption by
blood. For the blood of Thy martyrs and saints

Shall enrich the earth, shall create the holy places.

For wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever a martyr has given his
blood for the blood of Christ,

There is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not depart from it
Though armies trample over it, though sightseers come with

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guide-books looking over it;
From where the western seas gnaw at the coast of Iona,
To the death in the desert, the prayer in forgotten places by the
broken imperial column,
From such ground springs that which forever renews the earth
Though it is forever denied. Therefore, O God, we thank Thee
Who hast given such blessing to Canterbury.

Forgive us, O Lord, we acknowledge ourselves as type of the
common man,
Of the men and women who shut the door and sit by the fire;
Who fear the blessing of God, the loneliness of the night of God,
the surrender required, the deprivation inflicted;
Who fear the injustice of men less than the justice of God;
Who fear the hand at the window, the fire in the thatch, the fist in
the tavern, the push into the canal,
Less than we fear the love of God.
We acknowledge our trespass, our weakness, our fault; we
acknowledge
That the sin of the world is upon our heads; that the blood of the
martyrs and the agony of the saints
Is upon our heads.
Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.
Blessed Thomas, pray for us.

THE FAMILY REUNION

Persons

AMY, DOWAGER LADY MONCHENSEY, IVY, VIOLET, *and* AGATHA,
her younger sisters

COL. THE HON. GERALD PIPER, *and* THE HON. CHARLES PIPER,
brothers of her deceased husband

MARY, *daughter of a deceased cousin of Lady Monchensey*

DENMAN, *a parlourmaid*

HARRY, LORD MONCHENSEY, *Amy's eldest son*

DOWNING, *his servant and chauffeur*

DR. WARBURTON

SERGEANT WINCHELL

THE EUMENIDES

*The scene is laid in a country house in the
North of England*

PART I

The drawing-room, after tea. An afternoon in late March.

Scene I

AMY, IVY, VIOLET, AGATHA, GERALD, CHARLES, MARY

[DENMAN enters to draw the curtains]

AMY. Not yet! I will ring for you. It is still quite light.

I have nothing to do but watch the days draw out,

Now that I sit in the house from October to June,

And the swallow comes too soon and the spring will be over

And the cuckoo will be gone before I am out again.

O Sun, that was once so warm, O Light that was taken for granted

When I was young and strong, and sun and light unsought for

And the night unfared and the day expected

And clocks could be trusted, tomorrow assured

And time would not stop in the dark!

Put on the lights. But leave the curtains undrawn.

Make up the fire. Will the spring never come? I am cold.

AGATHA. Wishwood was always a cold place, Amy.

IVY. I have always told Amy she should go south in the winter.

Were I in Amy's position, I would go south in the winter.

I would follow the sun, not wait for the sun to come here.

I would go south in the winter, if I could afford it,

Not freeze, as I do, in Bayswater, by a gas-fire counting shillings.

VIOLET. Go south! to the English circulating libraries,

To the military widows and the English chaplains,

To the chilly deck-chair and the strong cold tea —

The strong cold stewed bad Indian tea.

CHARLES. That's not Amy's style at all. We are country-bred people.

Amy has been too long used to our ways

Living with horses and dogs and guns

THE FAMILY REUNION

Ever to want to leave England in the winter.
But a single man like me is better off in London:
A man can be very cosy at his club
Even in an English winter.

GERALD. Well, as for me,
I'd just as soon be a subaltern again
To be back in the East. An incomparable climate
For a man who can exercise a little common prudence;
And your servants look after you very much better.

AMY. My servants are perfectly competent, Gerald.
I can still see to that.

VIOLET. Well, as for me,
I would never go south, no, definitely never,
Even could I do it as well as Amy:
England's bad enough, I would never go south,
Simply to see the vulgarest people —
You can keep out of their way at home;
People with money from heaven knows where —

GERALD. Dividends from aeroplane shares.

VIOLET. They bathe all day and they dance all night
In the absolute *minimum* of clothes.

CHARLES. It's the cocktail-drinking does the harm:
There's nothing on earth so bad for the young.
All that a civilised person needs
Is a glass of dry sherry or two before dinner.
The modern young people don't know what they're drinking,
Modern young people don't care what they're eating;
They've lost their sense of taste and smell
Because of their cocktails and cigarettes.

[Enter DENMAN with sherry and whisky. CHARLES takes sherry and
GERALD whisky.]

That's what it comes to.

[Lights a cigarette]

IVY. The younger generation
Are undoubtedly decadent.

CHARLES. The younger generation
Are not what we were. Haven't the stamina,
Haven't the sense of responsibility.

GERALD. You're being very hard on the younger generation.
I don't come across them very much now, myself;

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But I must say I've met some very decent specimens
And some first-class shots — better than you were,
Charles, as I remember. Besides, you've got to make allowances:
We haven't left them such an easy world to live in.
Let the younger generation speak for itself:
It's Mary's generation. What does she think about it?

MARY. Really, Cousin Gerald, if you want information
About the younger generation, you must ask someone else.
I'm afraid that I don't deserve the compliment:
I don't belong to any generation.

[Exit]

VIOLET. Really, Gerald, I must say you're very tactless,
And I think that Charles might have been more considerate.

GERALD. I'm very sorry: but why was she upset?
I only meant to draw her into the conversation.

CHARLES. She's a nice girl; but it's a difficult age for her.
I suppose she must be getting on for thirty?
She ought to be married, that's what it is.

AMY. So she should have been, if things had gone as I intended.
Harry's return does not make things easy for her
At the moment; but life may still go right.
Meanwhile, let us drop the subject. The less said the better.

GERALD. That reminds me, Amy,
When are the boys all due to arrive?

AMY. I do not want the clock to stop in the dark.
If you want to know why I never leave Wishwood
That is the reason. I keep Wishwood alive
To keep the family alive, to keep them together,
To keep me alive, and I live to keep them.
You none of you understand how old you are
And death will come to you as a mild surprise,
A momentary shudder in a vacant room.
Only Agatha seems to discover some meaning in death
Which I cannot find.

— I am only certain of Arthur and John,
Arthur in London, John in Leicestershire:
They should both be here in good time for dinner.
Harry telephoned to me from Marseilles,
He would come by air to Paris, and so to London,
And hoped to arrive in the course of the evening.

THE FAMILY REUNION

VIOLET. Harry was always the most likely to be late.

AMY. This time, it will not be his fault.

We are very lucky to have Harry at all.

IVY. And when will you have your birthday cake, Amy,
And open your presents?

AMY. After dinner:

That is the best time.

IVY. It is the first time

You have not had your cake and your presents at tea.

AMY. This is a very particular occasion

As you ought to know. It will be the first time

For eight years that we have all been together.

AGATHA. It is going to be rather painful for Harry

After eight years and all that has happened

To come back to Wishwood.

GERALD. Why, painful?

VIOLET. Gerald! you know what Agatha means.

AGATHA. I mean painful, because everything is irrevocable,

Because the past is irremediable,

Because the future can only be built

Upon the real past. Wandering in the tropics

Or against the painted scene of the Mediterranean,

Harry must often have remembered Wishwood —

The nursery tea, the school holiday,

The daring feats on the old pony,

And thought to creep back through the little door.

He will find a new Wishwood. Adaptation is hard.

AMY. Nothing is changed, Agatha, at Wishwood.

Everything is kept as it was when he left it,

Except the old pony, and the mongrel setter

Which I had to have destroyed.

Nothing has been changed. I have seen to that.

AGATHA. Yes. I mean that at Wishwood he will find another Harry.

The man who returns will have to meet

The boy who left. Round by the stables,

In the coach-house, in the orchard,

In the plantation, down the corridor

That led to the nursery, round the corner

Of the new wing, he will have to face him —

And it will not be a very jolly corner.

THE FAMILY REUNION

When the loop in time comes — and it does not come for everybody —

The hidden is revealed, and the spectres show themselves.

GERALD. I don't in the least know what you're talking about.

You seem to be wanting to give us all the hump.

I must say, this isn't cheerful for Amy's birthday

Or for Harry's homecoming. Make him feel at home, I say!

Make him feel that what has happened doesn't matter.

He's taken his medicine, I've no doubt.

Let him marry again and carry on at Wishwood.

AMY. Thank you, Gerald. Though Agatha means

As a rule, a good deal more than she cares to betray,

I am bound to say that I agree with you.

CHARLES. I never wrote to him when he lost his wife —

That was just about a year ago, wasn't it?

Do you think that I ought to mention it now?

It seems to me too late.

AMY. Much too late.

If he wants to talk about it, that's another matter;

But I don't believe he will. He will wish to forget it.

I do not mince matters in front of the family:

You can call it nothing but a blessed relief.

VIOLET. I call it providential.

IVY. Yet it must have been shocking,

Especially to lose anybody in *that* way —

Swept off the deck in the middle of a storm,

And never even to recover the body.

CHARLES. 'Well-known Peeress Vanishes from Liner'.

GERALD. Yes, it's odd to think of her as permanently *missing*.

VIOLET. Had she been drinking?

AMY. I would never ask him.

IVY. These things are much better not enquired into.

She may have done it in a fit of temper.

GERALD. I never met her.

AMY. I am very glad you did not.

I am very glad that none of you ever met her.

It will make the situation very much easier

And is why I was so anxious you should all be here.

She never would have been one of the family,

She never wished to be one of the family,

THE FAMILY REUNION

She only wanted to keep him to herself
To satisfy her vanity. That's why she dragged him .
All over Europe and half round the world
To expensive hotels and undesirable society
Which she could choose herself. She never wanted
Harry's relations or Harry's old friends;
She never wanted to fit herself to Harry,
But only to bring Harry down to her own level.
A restless shivering painted shadow
In life, she is less than a shadow in death.
You might as well all of you know the truth
For the sake of the future. There can be no grief
And no regret and no remorse.
I would have prevented it if I could. For the sake of the future:
Harry is to take command at Wishwood
And I hope we can contrive his future happiness.
Do not discuss his absence. Please behave only
As if nothing had happened in the last eight years.

GERALD. That will be a little difficult.

VIOLET. Nonsense, Gerald!

You must see for yourself it's the only thing to do.

AGATHA. Thus with most careful devotion

Thus with precise attention
To detail, interfering preparation
Of that which is already prepared
Men tighten the knot of confusion
Into perfect misunderstanding,
Reflecting a pocket-torch of observation
Upon each other's opacity
Neglecting all the admonitions
From the world around the corner
The wind's talk in the dry holly-tree
The inclination of the moon
The attraction of the dark passage
The paw under the door.

CHORUS (IVY, VIOLET, GERALD *and* CHARLES). Why do we feel
embarrassed, impatient, fretful, ill at ease,

Assembled like amateur actors who have not been assigned their
parts?

Like amateur actors in a dream when the curtain rises, to find

THE FAMILY REUNION

themselves dressed for a different play, or having rehearsed the wrong parts,

Waiting for the rustling in the stalls, the titter in the dress circle, the laughter and catcalls in the gallery?

CHARLES. I might have been in St. James's Street, in a comfortable chair rather nearer the fire.

IVY. I might have been visiting Cousin Lily at Sidmouth, if I had not had to come to this party.

GERALD. I might have been staying with Compton-Smith, down at his place in Dorset.

VIOLET. I should have been helping Lady Bumpus, at the Vicar's American Tea.

CHORUS. Yet we are here at Amy's command, to play an unread part in some monstrous farce, ridiculous in some nightmare pantomime.

AMY. What's that? I thought I saw someone pass the window.
What time is it?

CHARLES. Nearly twenty to seven.

AMY. John should be here now, he has the shortest way to come.
John at least, if not Arthur. Hark, there is someone coming:
Yes, it must be John.

[Enter HARRY]

Harry!

[HARRY stops suddenly at the door and stares at the window]

IVY. Welcome, Harry!

GERALD. Well done!

VIOLET. Welcome home to Wishwood!

CHARLES. Why, what's the matter?

AMY. Harry, if you want the curtains drawn you should let me ring for Denman.

HARRY. How can you sit in this blaze of light for all the world to look at?

If you knew how you looked, when I saw you through the window!
Do you like to be stared at by eyes through a window?

AMY. You forget, Harry, that you are at Wishwood,
Not in town, where you have to close the blinds.
There is no one to see you but our servants who belong here,
And who all want to see you back, Harry.

HARRY. Look there, look there: do you see them?

GERALD. No, I don't see anyone about.

THE FAMILY REUNION

HARRY.

No, no, not there. Look there!

Can't you see them? *You* don't see them, but I see them,
And they see me. This is the first time that I have seen them.
In the Java Straits, in the Sunda Sea,
In the sweet sickly tropical night, I knew they were coming.
In Italy, from behind the nightingale's thicket,
The eyes stared at me, and corrupted that song.
Behind the palm trees in the Grand Hotel
They were always there. But I did not *see* them.
Why should they wait until I came back to Wishwood?
There were a thousand places where I might have met them!
Why here? why here?

Many happy returns of the day, mother.

Aunt Ivy, Aunt Violet, Uncle Gerald, Uncle Charles. Agatha.

AMY. We are very glad to have you back, Harry.

Now we shall all be together for dinner.

The servants have been looking forward to your coming:

Would you like to have them in after dinner

Or wait till tomorrow? I am sure you must be tired.

You will find everybody here, and everything the same.

Mr. Bevan — you remember — wants to call tomorrow

On some legal business, a question about taxes —

But I think you would rather wait till you are rested.

Your room is all ready for you. Nothing has been changed.

HARRY. Changed? nothing changed? how can you say that nothing is changed?

You all look so withered and young.

GERALD.

We must have a ride tomorrow.

You'll find you know the country as well as ever.

There wasn't an inch of it you didn't know.

But you'll have to see about a couple of new hunters.

CHARLES. And I've a new wine merchant to recommend you;

Your cellar could do with a little attention.

IVY. And you'll really have to find a successor to old Hawkins.

It's really high time the old man was pensioned.

He's let the rock garden go to rack and ruin,

And he's nearly half blind. I've spoken to your mother

Time and time again: she's done nothing about it

Because she preferred to wait for your coming.

VIOLET. And time and time again I have spoken to your mother

THE FAMILY REUNION

About the waste that goes on in the kitchen.

Mrs. Packell is too old to know what she is doing.

It really needs a man in charge of things at Wishwood.

AMY. You see your aunts and uncles are very helpful, Harry.

I have always found them forthcoming with advice

Which I have never taken. Now it is your business.

I have only struggled to keep Wishwood going

And to make no changes before your return.

Now it's for you to manage. I am an old woman.

They can give me no further advice when I'm dead.

IVY. Oh, dear Amy!

No one wants you to die, I'm sure!

Now that Harry's back, is the time to think of living.

HARRY. Time and time and time, and change, no change!

You all of you try to talk as if nothing had happened,

And yet you are talking of nothing else. Why not get to the point

Or if you want to pretend that I am another person —

A person that you have conspired to invent, please do so

In my absence. I shall be less embarrassing to you. Agatha?

AGATHA. I think, Harry, that having got so far —

If you want no pretences, let us have no pretences:

And you must try at once to make us understand,

And we must try to understand you.

HARRY. But how can I explain, how can I explain to *you*?

You will understand less after I have explained it.

All that I could hope to make you understand

Is only events: not what has happened.

And people to whom nothing has ever happened

Cannot understand the unimportance of events.

GERALD. Well, you can't say that nothing has happened to *me*.

I started as a youngster on the North-West Frontier —

Been in tight corners most of my life

And some pretty nasty messes.

CHARLES. And there isn't much would surprise me, Harry;

Or shock me, either.

HARRY. You are all people

To whom nothing has happened, at most a continual impact

Of external events. You have gone through life in sleep,

Never woken to the nightmare. I tell you, life would be unendurable

If you were wide awake. You do not know

THE FAMILY REUNION

The noxious smell untraceable in the drains,
Inaccessible to the plumbers, that has its hour of the night; you do
not know

The unspoken voice of sorrow in the ancient bedroom
At three o'clock in the morning. I am not speaking
Of my own experience, but trying to give you
Comparisons in a more familiar medium. I am the old house
With the noxious smell and the sorrow before morning,
In which all past is present, all degradation
Is unredeemable. As for what happens —
Of the past you can only see what is past,
Not what is always present. That is what matters.

AGATHA. Nevertheless, Harry, best tell us as you can:

Talk in your own language, without stopping to debate
Whether it may be too far beyond our understanding.

HARRY. The sudden solitude in a crowded desert

In a thick smoke, many creatures moving
Without direction, for no direction
Leads anywhere but round and round in that vapour —
Without purpose, and without principle of conduct
In flickering intervals of light and darkness;
The partial anæsthesia of suffering without feeling
And partial observation of one's own automatism
While the slow stain sinks deeper through the skin
Tainting the flesh and discolouring the bone —
This is what matters, but it is unspeakable,
Untranslatable: I talk in general terms
Because the particular has no language. One thinks to escape
By violence, but one is still alone
In an over-crowded desert, jostled by ghosts.
It was only reversing the senseless direction
For a momentary rest on the burning wheel
That cloudless night in the mid-Atlantic
When I pushed her over.

VIOLET. Pushed her?

HARRY. You would never imagine anyone could sink so quickly.

I had always supposed, wherever I went
That she would be with me; whatever I did
That she was unkillable. It was not like that.
Everything is true in a different sense.

THE FAMILY REUNION

I expected to find her when I went back to the cabin.
Later, I became excited, I think I made enquiries;
The purser and the steward were extremely sympathetic
And the doctor very attentive.
That night I slept heavily, alone.

AMY. Harry!

CHARLES. You mustn't indulge such dangerous fancies.
It's only doing harm to your mother and yourself.
Of course we know what really happened, we read it in the papers —
No need to revert to it. Remember, my boy,
I understand, your life together made it seem more horrible.
There's a lot in my own past life that presses on my chest
When I wake, as I do now, early before morning.
I understand these feelings better than you know —
But *you* have no reason to reproach yourself.
Your conscience can be clear.

HARRY. It goes a good deal deeper
Than what people call their conscience; it is just the cancer
That eats away the self. I knew how you would take it.
First of all, you isolate the single event
As something so dreadful that it couldn't have happened,
Because you could not bear it. So you must believe
That I suffer from delusions. It is not my conscience,
Not my mind, that is diseased, but the world I have to live in.
— I lay two days in contented drowsiness;
Then I recovered. I am afraid of sleep:
A condition in which one can be caught for the last time.
And also waking. She is nearer than ever.
The contamination has reached the marrow
And *they* are always near. Here, nearer than ever.
They are very close here. I had not expected that.

AMY. Harry, Harry, you are very tired
And overwrought. Coming so far
And making such haste, the change is too sudden for you.
You are unused to our foggy climate
And the northern country. When you see Wishwood
Again by day, all will be the same again.
I beg you to go now and rest before dinner.
Get Downing to draw you a hot bath,
And you will feel better.

THE FAMILY REUNION

AGATHA. There are certain points I do not yet understand :

They will be clear later. I am also convinced
That you only hold a fragment of the explanation.
It is only because of what you do not understand
That you feel the need to declare what you do.
There is more to understand : hold fast to that
As the way to freedom.

HARRY. I think I see what you mean,
Dimly — as you once explained the sobbing in the chimney
The evil in the dark closet, which they said was not there,
Which they explained away, but you explained them
Or at least, made me cease to be afraid of them.
I will go and have my bath.

[Exit]

GERALD. God preserve us !
I never thought it would be as bad as this.

VIOLET. There is only one thing to be done :
Harry must see a doctor.

IVY. But I understand —
I have heard of such cases before — that people in his condition
Often betray the most immoderate resentment
At such a suggestion. They can be very cunning —
Their malady makes them so. They do not want to be cured
And they know what you are thinking.

CHARLES. He has probably let this notion grow in his mind,
Living among strangers, with no one to talk to.
I suspect it is simply that the wish to get rid of her
Makes him believe he did. He cannot trust his good fortune.
I believe that all he needs is someone to talk to,
To get it off his mind. I'll have a talk to him tomorrow.

AMY. Most certainly not, Charles, you are not the right person.
I prefer to believe that a few days at Wishwood
Among his own family, is all that he needs.

GERALD. Nevertheless, Amy, there's something in Violet's suggestion.
Why not ring up Warburton, and ask him to join us?
He's an old friend of the family, it's perfectly natural
That he should be asked. He looked after all the boys
When they were children. I'll have a word with him.
He can talk to Harry, and Harry need have no suspicion.
I'd trust Warburton's opinion.

THE FAMILY REUNION

AMY. If anyone speaks to Dr. Warburton
It should be myself. What does Agatha think?

AGATHA. It seems a necessary move
In an unnecessary action,
Not for the good that it will do
But that nothing may be left undone
On the margin of the impossible.

AMY. Very well.
I will ring up the doctor myself.

[Exit]

CHARLES. Meanwhile, I have an idea. Why not question Downing?
He's been with Harry ten years, he's absolutely discreet.
He was with them on the boat. He might be of use.

IVY. Charles! you don't really suppose
That he might have pushed her over?

CHARLES. In any case, I shouldn't blame Harry.
I might have done the same thing once, myself.
Nobody knows what he's likely to do
Until there's somebody he wants to get rid of.

GERALD. Even so, we don't want Downing to know
Any more than he knows already.
And even if he knew, it's very much better
That he shouldn't know that we knew it also.
Why not let sleeping dogs lie?

CHARLES. All the same, there's a question or two
[Rings the bell]

That I'd like to ask Downing.
He shan't know why I'm asking.

[Enter DENMAN]

Denman, where is Downing? Is he up with his Lordship?

DENMAN. He's out in the garage, Sir, with his Lordship's car.

CHARLES. Tell him I'd like to have a word with him, please.

[Exit DENMAN]

VIOLET. Charles, if you are determined upon this investigation,
Which I am convinced is going to lead us nowhere,
And which I am sure Amy would disapprove of —
I only wish to express my emphatic protest
Both against your purpose and the means you are employing.

CHARLES. My purpose is, to find out what's wrong with Harry:
Until we know that, we can do nothing for him.

THE FAMILY REUNION

And as for my means, we can't afford to be squeamish
In taking hold of anything that comes to hand.
If you are interested in helping Harry
You can hardly object to the means.

VIOLET. I do object.

IVY. And I wish to associate myself with my sister
In her objections —

AGATHA. I have no objection,
Any more than I object to asking Dr. Warburton:
I only see that this is all quite irrelevant;
We had better leave Charles to talk to Downing
And pursue his own methods.

[Rises]

VIOLET. I do not agree.
I think there should be witnesses. I intend to remain.
And I wish to be present to hear what Downing says.
I want to know at once, not be told about it later.

IVY. And I shall stay with Violet.

AGATHA. I shall return
When Downing has left you.

[Exit]

CHARLES. Well, I'm very sorry
You all see it like this: but there simply are times
When there's nothing to do but take the bull by the horns,
And this is one.

[Knock: and enter DOWNING]

CHARLES. Good evening, Downing.
It's good to see you again, after all these years.
You're well, I hope?

DOWNING. Thank you, very well indeed, Sir.

CHARLES. I'm sorry to send for you so abruptly,
But I've a question I'd like to put to you,
I'm sure you won't mind, it's about his Lordship.
You've looked after his Lordship for over ten years . . .

DOWNING. Eleven years, Sir, next Lady Day.

CHARLES. Eleven years, and you know him pretty well.
And I'm sure that you've been a good friend to him, too.
We haven't seen him for nearly eight years;
And to tell the truth, now that we've seen him,
We're a little worried about his health.

THE FAMILY REUNION

He doesn't seem to be . . . quite himself.

DOWNING. Quite natural, if I may say so, Sir,
After what happened.

CHARLES. Quite so, quite.

Downing, you were with them on the voyage from New York -
We didn't learn very much about the circumstances;
We only knew what we read in the papers —
Of course, there was a great deal too much in the papers.
Downing, do you think that it might have been suicide,
And that his Lordship knew it?

DOWNING. Unlikely, Sir, if I may say so.
Much more likely to have been an accident.
I mean, knowing her Ladyship,
I don't think she had the courage.

CHARLES. Did she ever talk of suicide?

DOWNING. Oh yes, she did, every now and again.
But in my opinion, it is those that talk
That are the least likely. To my way of thinking
She only did it to frighten people.
If you take my meaning — just for the effect.

CHARLES. I understand, Downing. Was she in good spirits?

DOWNING. Well, always about the same, Sir.
What I mean is, always up and down.
Down in the morning, and up in the evening,
And *then* she used to get rather excited,
And, in a way, irresponsible, Sir.
If I may make so bold, Sir,
I always thought that a very few cocktails
Went a long way with her Ladyship.
She wasn't one of those that are *designed* for drinking:
It's natural for some and unnatural for others.

CHARLES. And how was his Lordship, during the voyage?

DOWNING. Well, you might say depressed, Sir.
But you know his Lordship was always very quiet:
Very uncommon that I saw him in high spirits.
For what my judgment's worth, I always said his Lordship
Suffered from what they call a kind of repression.
But what struck me . . . more nervous than usual;
I mean to say, you could see that he was nervous.
He behaved as if he thought something might happen.

THE FAMILY REUNION

CHARLES. What sort of thing?

DOWNING. Well, I don't know, Sir.

But he seemed very anxious about my Lady.
Tried to keep her in when the weather was rough,
Didn't like to see her lean over the rail.
He was in a rare fright, once or twice.
But you know, it is just my opinion, Sir,
That his Lordship is rather psychic, as they say.

CHARLES. Were they always together?

DOWNING. Always, Sir.

That was just my complaint against my Lady.
It's my opinion that man and wife
Shouldn't see too much of each other, Sir.
Quite the contrary of the usual opinion,
I dare say. She wouldn't leave him alone.
And there's my complaint against these ocean liners
With all their swimming baths and gymnasiums
There's not even a place where a man can go
For a quiet smoke, where the women can't follow him.
She wouldn't leave him out of her sight.

CHARLES. During that evening, did you see him?

DOWNING. Oh yes, Sir, I'm sure I saw him.

I don't mean to say that he had any orders —
His Lordship is always most considerate
About keeping me up. But when I say I saw him,
I mean that I saw him accidental.
You see, Sir, I was down in the Tourist,
And I took a bit of air before I went to bed,
And you could see the corner of the upper deck.
And I remember, there I saw his Lordship
Leaning over the rail, looking at the water —
There wasn't a moon, but I was sure it was him.
While I took my turn about, for near half an hour
He stayed there alone, looking over the rail.
Her Ladyship must have been all right then,
Mustn't she, Sir? or else he'd have known it.

CHARLES. Oh yes . . . quite so. Thank you, Downing,
I don't think we need you any more.

GERALD. Oh, Downing,
Is there anything wrong with his Lordship's car?

THE FAMILY REUNION

DOWNING. Oh no, Sir, she's in good running order:

I see to that.

GERALD. I only wondered

Why you've been busy about it tonight.

DOWNING. Nothing wrong, Sir:

Only I like to have her always ready.

Would there be anything more, Sir?

GERALD.

Thank you, Downing;

Nothing more.

[Exit DOWNING]

VIOLET. Well, Charles, I must say, with your investigations,

You seem to have left matters much as they were —

Except for having brought Downing into it:

Of which I disapprove.

CHARLES.

Of which you disapprove.

But I believe that an unconscious accomplice is desirable.

CHORUS. Why should we stand here like guilty conspirators, waiting
for some revelation

When the hidden shall be exposed, and the newsboy shall shout in
the street?

When the private shall be made public, the common photographer
Flashlight for the picture papers: why do we huddle together
In a horrid amity of misfortune? why should we be implicated,
brought in and brought together?

IVY. I do not trust Charles with his confident vulgarity, acquired from
worldly associates.

GERALD. Ivy is only concerned for herself, and her credit among her
shabby genteel acquaintance.

VIOLET. Gerald is certain to make some blunder, he is useless out of the
army.

CHARLES. Violet is afraid that her status as Amy's sister will be
diminished.

CHORUS. We all of us make the pretension

To be the uncommon exception

To the universal bondage.

We like to appear in the newspapers

So long as we are in the right column.

We know about the railway accident

We know about the sudden thrombosis

And the slowly hardening artery.

THE FAMILY REUNION

We like to be thought well of by others
So that we may think well of ourselves.
And any explanation will satisfy:
We only ask to be reassured
About the noises in the cellar
And the window that should not have been open.
Why do we all behave as if the door might suddenly open, the
curtains be drawn,
The cellar make some dreadful disclosure, the roof disappear,
And we should cease to be sure of what is real or unreal?
Hold tight, hold tight, we must insist that the world is what we have
always taken it to be.

AMY'S VOICE. Ivy! Violet! has Arthur or John come yet?

IVY. There is no news of Arthur or John.

[Enter AMY and AGATHA]

AMY. It is very annoying. They both promised to be here

In good time for dinner. It is very annoying.

Now they can hardly arrive in time to dress.

I do not understand what could have gone wrong

With both of them, coming from different directions.

Well, we must go and dress, I suppose. I hope Harry will feel better
After his rest upstairs.

[Exeunt, except AGATHA]

Scene II

AGATHA

[Enter MARY with flowers]

MARY. The spring is very late in this northern country,
Late and uncertain, clings to the south wall.

The gardener had no garden-flowers to give me for this evening.

AGATHA. I always forget how late the spring is, here.

MARY. I had rather wait for our windblown blossoms,
Such as they are, than have these greenhouse flowers
Which do not belong here, which do not know
The wind and rain, as I know them.

AGATHA. I wonder how many we shall be for dinner.

MARY. Seven . . . nine . . . ten surely.
I hear that Harry has arrived already
And he was the only one that was uncertain.
Arthur or John may be late, of course.
We may have to keep the dinner back . . .

AGATHA. And also Dr. Warburton. At least, Amy has invited him.

MARY. Dr. Warburton? I think she might have told me;
It is very difficult, having to plan
For uncertain numbers. Why did she ask him?

AGATHA. She only thought of asking him a little while ago.

MARY. Well, there's something to be said for having an outsider;
For what is more formal than a family dinner?
An official occasion of uncomfortable people
Who meet very seldom, making conversation.
I am very glad if Dr. Warburton is coming.
I shall have to sit between Arthur and John.
Which is worse, thinking of what to say to John,
Or having to listen to Arthur's chatter
When he thinks he is behaving like a man of the world?
Cousin Agatha, I want your advice.

AGATHA. I should have thought
You had more than you wanted of that, when at college.

THE FAMILY REUNION

MARY. I might have known you'd throw that up against me.

I know I wasn't one of your favourite students :

I only saw you as a hard headmistress

Who knew the way of dominating timid girls.

I don't see you any differently now ;

But I really wish that I'd taken your advice

And tried for a fellowship, seven years ago.

Now I want your advice, because there's no one else to ask,

And because you are strong, and because you don't belong here

Any more than I do. I want to get away.

AGATHA. After seven years?

MARY. Oh, you don't understand !

But you do understand. You only want to know

Whether I understand. You know perfectly well,

What Cousin Amy wants, she usually gets.

Why do *you* so seldom come here? *You're* not afraid of her,

But I think you must have wanted to avoid collision.

I suppose I could have gone, if I'd had the moral courage,

Even against a will like hers. I know very well

Why she wanted to keep me. She didn't need me :

She would have done just as well with a hired servant

Or with none. She only wanted me for Harry —

Not such a compliment: she only wanted

To have a tame daughter-in-law with very little money,

A housekeeper-companion for her and Harry.

Even when he married, she still held on to me

Because she couldn't bear to let any project go ;

And even when *she* died: I believed that Cousin Amy —

I almost believed it — had killed her by willing.

Doesn't that sound awful? I know that it does.

Did you ever meet her? What was she like?

AGATHA. I am the only one who ever met her,

The only one Harry asked to his wedding :

Amy did not know that. I was sorry for her ;

I could see that she distrusted me — she was frightened of the
family,

She wanted to fight them — with the weapons of the weak,

Which are too violent. And it could not have been easy,

Living with Harry. It's not what she did to Harry,

That's important, I think, but what he did to himself.

THE FAMILY REUNION

MARY. But it wasn't till I knew that Harry had returned
That I felt the strength to go. I know I must go.
But where? I want a job: and you can help me.

AGATHA. I am very sorry, Mary, I am very sorry for you;
Though you may not think me capable of such a feeling.
I would like to help you: but you must not run away.
Any time before now, it would have shown courage
And would have been right. Now, the courage is only the moment
And the moment is only fear and pride. I see more than this,
More than I can tell you, more than there are words for.
At this moment, there is no decision to be made;
The decision will be made by powers beyond us
Which now and then emerge. You and I, Mary,
Are only watchers and waiters: not the easiest rôle.
I must go and change for dinner.

[Exit]

MARY. So you will not help me!
Waiting, waiting, always waiting.
I think this house *means* to keep us waiting.

[Enter HARRY]

HARRY. Waiting? For what?

MARY. How do you do, Harry.
You are down very early. I thought you had just arrived.
Did you have a comfortable journey?

HARRY. Not very.
But, at least, it did not last long. How are you, Mary?

MARY. Oh, very well. What are you looking for?

HARRY. I had only just noticed that this room is quite unchanged:
The same hangings . . . the same pictures . . . even the table,
The chairs, the sofa . . . all in the same positions.
I was looking to see if anything was changed,
But if so, I can't find it.

MARY. Your mother insisted
On everything being kept the same as when you left it.

HARRY. I wish she had not done that. It's very unnatural,
This arresting of the normal change of things:
But it's very like her. What I might have expected.
It only makes the changing of people
All the more manifest.

MARY. Yes, nothing changes here,

THE FAMILY REUNION

And we just go on . . . drying up, I suppose,
Not noticing the change. But to you, I am sure,
We must seem very altered.

HARRY. You have hardly changed at all —

And I haven't seen you since you came down from Oxford.

MARY. Well, I must go and change for dinner.

We do change — to that extent.

HARRY. No, don't go just yet.

MARY. Are you glad to be at home?

HARRY. There was something

I wanted to ask you. I don't know yet.

All these years I'd been longing to get back

Because I thought I never should. I thought it was a place

Where life was substantial and simplified —

But the simplification took place in my memory.

I think. It seems I shall get rid of nothing.

Of none of the shadows that I wanted to escape;

And at the same time, other memories,

Earlier, forgotten, begin to return

Out of my childhood. I can't explain.

But I thought I might escape from one life to another.

And it may be all one life, with no escape. Tell me.

Were you ever happy here, as a child at Wishwood?

MARY. Happy? not really, though I never knew why:

It always seemed that it must be my own fault,

And never to be happy was always to be naughty.

But there were reasons: I was only a cousin

Kept here because there was nothing else to do with me.

I didn't belong here. It was different for you.

And you seemed so much older. We were rather in awe of you –

At least, I was.

HARRY. Why were we not happy?

MARY. Well, it all seemed to be imposed upon us;

Even the nice things were laid out ready,

And the treats were always so carefully prepared ;

There was never any time to invent our own enjoyments.

But perhaps it was all designed for you, not for us.

HARRY. No, it didn't seem like that. I was part of the design

As well as you. But what was the design?

It never came off. But do you remember

THE FAMILY REUNION

MARY. The hollow tree in what we called the wilderness

HARRY. Down near the river. That was the stockade

From which we fought the Indians, Arthur and John.

MARY. It was the cave where we met by moonlight

To raise the evil spirits.

HARRY. Arthur and John.

Of course we were punished for being out at night

After being put to bed. But at least they never knew

Where we had been.

MARY. They never found the secret.

HARRY. Not then. But later, coming back from school

For the holidays, after the formal reception

And the family festivities, I made my escape

As soon as I could, and slipped down to the river

To find the old hiding place. The wilderness was gone,

The tree had been felled, and a neat summer-house

Had been erected, 'to please the children'.

It's absurd that one's only memory of freedom

Should be a hollow tree in a wood by the river.

MARY. But when I was a child I took everything for granted,

Including the stupidity of older people —

They lived in another world, which did not touch me.

Just now, I find them very difficult to bear.

They are always assured that you ought to be happy

At the very moment when you are wholly conscious

Of being a misfit, of being superfluous.

But why should I talk about my commonplace troubles?

They must seem very trivial indeed to you.

It's just ordinary hopelessness.

HARRY. One thing you cannot know:

The sudden extinction of every alternative,

The unexpected crash of the iron cataract.

You do not know what hope is, until you have lost it.

You only know what it is not to hope:

You do not know what it is to have hope taken from you,

Or to fling it away, to join the legion of the hopeless

Unrecognised by other men, though sometimes by each other.

MARY. I know what you mean. That is an experience

I have not had. Nevertheless, however real,

However cruel, it may be a deception.

THE FAMILY REUNION

HARRY.

What I see

May be one dream or another ; if there is nothing else
The most real is what I fear. The bright colour fades
Together with the unrecapturable emotion,
The glow upon the world, that never found its object ;
And the eye adjusts itself to a twilight
Where the dead stone is seen to be batrachian,
The aphyllous branch ophidian.

MARY.

You bring your own landscape

No more real than the other. And in a way you contradict
yourself:

That sudden comprehension of the death of hope
Of which you speak, I know you have experienced it,
And I can well imagine how awful it must be.
But in this world another hope keeps springing
In an unexpected place, while we are unconscious of it.
You hoped for something, in coming back to Wishwood,
Or you would not have come.

HARRY.

Whatever I hoped for

Now that I am here I know I shall not find it.
The instinct to return to the point of departure
And start again as if nothing had happened,
Isn't that all folly? It's like the hollow tree,
Not there.

MARY.

But surely, what you say

Only proves that you expected Wishwood
To be your real self, to do something for you
That you can only do for yourself.
What you need to alter is something inside you
Which you can change anywhere — here, as well as elsewhere.

HARRY. Something inside me, you think, that can be altered !

And here, indeed ! where I have felt them near me,
Here and here and here — wherever I am not looking,
Always flickering at the corner of my eye,
Almost whispering just out of earshot —
And inside too, in the nightly panic
Of dreaming dissolution. You do not know,
You cannot know, you cannot understand.

MARY. I think I could understand, but you would have to be patient
With me, and with people who have not had your experience.

THE FAMILY REUNION

HARRY. If I tried to explain, you could never understand:
Explaining would only make a worse misunderstanding;
Explaining would only set me farther away from you.
There is only one way for you to understand
And that is by seeing. They are much too clever
To admit you into *our* world. Yours is no better.
They have seen to that: it is part of the torment.

MARY. If you think I am incapable of understanding you —
But in any case, I must get ready for dinner.

HARRY. No, no, don't go! Please don't leave me
Just at this moment. I feel it is important.
Something should have come of this conversation.

MARY. I am not a wise person,
And in the ordinary sense I don't know you very well,
Although I remember you better than you think,
And what is the real you. I haven't much experience,
But I see something now which doesn't come from tutors
Or from books, or from thinking, or from observation:
Something which I did not know I knew.
Even if, as you say, Wishwood is a cheat,
Your family a delusion — then it's *all* a delusion,
Everything you feel — I don't mean what you think,
But what you feel. You attach yourself to loathing
As others do to loving: an infatuation
That's wrong, a good that's misdirected. You deceive yourself
Like the man convinced that he is paralysed
Or like the man who believes that he is blind
While he still sees the sunlight. I know that this is true.

HARRY. I have spent many years in useless travel;
You have staid in England, yet you seem
Like someone who comes from a very long distance,
Or the distant waterfall in the forest,
Inaccessible, half-heard.
And I hear your voice as in the silence
Between two storms, one hears the moderate usual noises
In the grass and leaves, of life persisting,
Which ordinarily pass unnoticed.
Perhaps you are right, though I do not know
How you should know it. Is the cold spring
Is the spring not an evil time, that excites us with lying voices?

THE FAMILY REUNION

MARY. The cold spring now is the time
For the ache in the moving root
The agony in the dark
The slow flow throbbing the trunk
The pain of the breaking bud.
These are the ones that suffer least:
The aconite under the snow
And the snowdrop crying for a moment in the wood.

HARRY. Spring is an issue of blood
A season of sacrifice
And the wail of the new full tide
Returning the ghosts of the dead
Those whom the winter drowned
Do not the ghosts of the drowned
Return to land in the spring?
Do the dead want to return?

MARY. Pain is the opposite of joy
But joy is a kind of pain
I believe the moment of birth
Is when we have knowledge of death
I believe the season of birth
Is the season of sacrifice
For the tree and the beast, and the fish
Thrashing itself upstream:
And what of the terrified spirit
Compelled to be reborn
To rise toward the violent sun
Wet wings into the rain cloud
Harefoot over the moon?

HARRY. What have we been saying? I think I was saying
That it seemed as if I had been always here
And you were someone who had come from a long distance.
Whether I know what I am saying, or why I say it,
That does not matter. You bring me news
Of a door that opens at the end of a corridor,
Sunlight and singing; when I had felt sure
That every corridor only led to another,
Or to a blank wall; that I kept moving
Only so as not to stay still. Singing and light.
Stop!

THE FAMILY REUNION

What is that? do you feel it?

MARY.

What, Harry?

HARRY. That apprehension deeper than all sense,
Deeper than the sense of smell, but like a smell
In that it is indescribable, a sweet and bitter smell
From another world. I know it, I know it!
More potent than ever before, a vapour dissolving
All other worlds, and me into it. O Mary!
Don't look at me like that! Stop! Try to stop it!
I am going. Oh why, now? Come out!
Come out! Where are you? Let me see you,
Since I know you are there, I know you are spying on me.
Why do you play with me, why do you let me go,
Only to surround me? — When I remember them
They leave me alone: when I forget them
Only for an instant of inattention
They are roused again, the sleepless hunters
That will not let me sleep. At the moment before sleep
I always see their claws distended
Quietly, as if they had never stirred.
It was only a moment, it was only one moment
That I stood in sunlight, and thought I might stay there.

MARY. Look at me. You can depend on me.

Harry! Harry! It's all *right*, I tell you.

If you will depend on me, it will be all right.

HARRY. Come out!

[*The curtains part, revealing the Eumenides in the window embrasure.*]

Why do you show yourselves now for the first time?

When I knew her, I was not the same person.

I was not any person. Nothing that I did

Has to do with me. The accident of a dreaming moment,

Of a dreaming age, when I was someone else

Thinking of something else, puts me among you.

I tell you, it is not me you are looking at,

Not me you are grinning at, not me your confidential looks

Incriminate, but that other person, if person

You thought I was: let your necrophily

Feed upon that carcase. They will not go.

MARY. Harry! There is no one here.

[*She goes to the window and pulls the curtains across*]

THE FAMILY REUNION

HARRY. They were here, I tell you. They are here.

Are you so imperceptive, have you such dull senses

That you could not see them? If I had realised

That you were so obtuse, I would not have listened

To your nonsense. Can't you help me?

You're of no use to me. I must face them.

I must fight them. But they are stupid.

How can one fight with stupidity?

Yet I must speak to them.

[He rushes forward and tears apart the curtains: but the embrasure is empty.]

MARY.

Oh, Harry!

Scene III

HARRY, MARY, IVY, VIOLET, GERALD, CHARLES

VIOLET. Good evening, Mary: aren't you dressed yet?
How do you think that Harry is looking?
Why, who could have pulled those curtains apart?

[Pulls them together]

Very well, I think, after such a long journey;
You know what a rush he had to be here in time
For his mother's birthday.

IVY. Mary, my dear,
Did you arrange these flowers? Just let me change them.
You don't mind, do you? I know so much about flowers;
Flowers have always been my passion.
You know I had my own garden once, in Cornwall,
When I could afford a garden; and I took several prizes
With my delphiniums. I was rather an authority.

GERALD. Good evening, Mary. You've seen Harry, I see.
It's good to have him back again, isn't it?
We must make him feel at home. And most auspicious
That he could be here for his mother's birthday.

MARY. I must go and change. I came in very late.

[Exit]

CHARLES. Now we only want Arthur and John
I'm glad that you'll all be together, Harry;
They need the influence of their elder brother.
Arthur's a bit irresponsible, you know;
You should have a sobering effect upon him.
After all, you're the head of the family.

AMY'S VOICE. Violet! Has Arthur or John come yet?

VIOLET. Neither of them is here yet, Amy.

[Enter AMY, with DR. WARBURTON]

AMY. It is most vexing. What can have happened?
I suppose it's the fog that is holding them up,

THE FAMILY REUNION

So it's no use to telephone anywhere. Harry!
Haven't you seen Dr. Warburton?
You know he's the oldest friend of the family,
And he's known you longer than anybody, Harry.
When he heard that you were going to be here for dinner
He broke an important engagement to come.

WARBURTON. I dare say we've both changed a good deal, Harry.
A country practitioner doesn't get younger.
It takes me back longer than you can remember
To see you again. But you can't have forgotten
The day when you came back from school with measles
And we had such a time to keep you in bed.
You didn't like being ill in the holidays.

IVY. It *was* unpleasant, coming home to have an illness.

VIOLET. It was always the same with your minor ailments
And children's epidemics: you would never stay in bed
Because you were convinced that you would never get well.

HARRY. Not, I think, without some justification:
For what you call restoration to health
Is only incubation of another malady.

WARBURTON. You mustn't take such a pessimistic view
Which is hardly complimentary to my profession.
But I remember, when I was a student at Cambridge,
I used to dream of making some great discovery
To do away with one disease or another.
Now I've had forty years' experience
I've left off thinking in terms of the laboratory.
We're all of us ill in one way or another:
We call it health when we find no symptom
Of illness. Health is a relative term.

IVY. You must have had a very rich experience, Doctor,
In forty years.

WARBURTON. Indeed, yes.
Even in a country practice. My first patient, now —
You wouldn't believe it, ladies — was a murderer,
Who suffered from an incurable cancer.
How he fought against it! I never saw a man
More anxious to live.

HARRY. Not at all extraordinary.
It is really harder to believe in murder

THE FAMILY REUNION

Than to believe in cancer. Cancer is here:
The lump, the dull pain, the occasional sickness:
Murder a reversal of sleep and waking.
Murder was there. Your ordinary murderer
Regards himself as an innocent victim.
To himself he is still what he used to be
Or what he would be. He cannot realise
That everything is irrevocable,
The past unredeemable. But cancer, now,
That is something real.

WARBURTON. Well, let's not talk of such matters.
How did we get onto the subject of cancer?
I really don't know. — But now you're all grown up
I haven't a patient left at Wishwood.
Wishwood was always a cold place, but healthy.
It's only when I get an invitation to dinner
That I ever see your mother.

VIOLET. Yes, look at your mother!
Except that she can't get about now in winter
You wouldn't think that she was a day older
Than on her birthday ten years ago.

GERALD. Is there any use in waiting for Arthur and John?

AMY. We might as well go in to dinner.
They may come before we finish. Will you take me in, Doctor?
I think we are very much the oldest present —
In fact we are the oldest inhabitants.
As we came first, we will go first, in to dinner.

WARBURTON. With pleasure, Lady Monchenscy,
And I hope that next year will bring me the same honour.

[*Exeunt* AMY, DR. WARBURTON, HARRY]

CHORUS. I am afraid of all that has happened, and of all that is to come;
Of the things to come that sit at the door, as if they had been there
always.
And the past is about to happen, and the future was long since
settled.
And the wings of the future darken the past, the beak and claws
have desecrated
History. Shamed
The first cry in the bedroom, the noise in the nursery, mutilated
The family album, rendered ludicrous

THE FAMILY REUNION

The tenants' dinner, the family picnic on the moors. Have torn
The roof from the house, or perhaps it was never there.
And the bird sits on the broken chimney. I am afraid.

IVY. This is a most undignified terror, and I must struggle against it.

GERALD. I am used to tangible danger, but only to what I can
understand.

VIOLET. It is the obtuseness of Gerald and Charles and that doctor,
that gets on my nerves.

CHARLES. If the matter were left in my hands, I think I could manage
the situation.

[*Exeunt*]

[*Enter MARY, and passes through to dinner. Enter AGATHA*]

AGATHA. The eye is on this house

The eye covers it

There are three together

May the three be separated

May the knot that was tied

Become unknotted

May the crossed bones

In the filled-up well

Be at last straightened

May the weasel and the otter

Be about their proper business

The eye of the day time

And the eye of the night time

Be diverted from this house

Till the knot is unknotted

The crossed is uncrossed

And the crooked is made straight.

[*Exit to dinner*]

END OF PART I

PART II

The library, after dinner.

Scene I

HARRY, WARBURTON

WARBURTON. I'm glad of a few minutes alone with you, Harry.
In fact, I had another reason for coming this evening
Than simply in honour of your mother's birthday.
I wanted a private conversation with you
On a confidential matter.

HARRY. I can imagine —
Though I think it is probably going to be useless,
Or if anything, make matters rather more difficult.
But talk about it, if you like.

WARBURTON. You don't understand me.
I'm sure you cannot know what is on my mind;
And as for making matters more difficult —
It is much more difficult not to be prepared
For something that is very likely to happen.

HARRY. O God, man, the things that are going to happen
Have already happened.

WARBURTON. That is in a sense true,
But without your knowing it, and what you know
Or do not know, at any moment
May make an endless difference to the future.
It's about your mother . . .

HARRY. What about my mother?
Everything has always been referred back to mother.
When we were children, before we went to school,
The rule of conduct was simply pleasing mother;
Misconduct was simply being unkind to mother;

THE FAMILY REUNION

What was wrong was whatever made her suffer,
And whatever made her happy was what was virtuous —
Though never very happy, I remember. That was why
We all felt like failures, before we had begun.
When we came back, for the school holidays,
They were not holidays, but simply a time
In which we were supposed to ~~make~~ ^{make} up to mother
For all the weeks during which she had not seen us
Except at half-term, and seeing us then
Only seemed to make her more unhappy, and made us
Feel more guilty, and so we misbehaved
Next day at school, in order to be punished,
For punishment made us feel less guilty. Mother
Never punished us, but made us feel guilty.
I think that the things that are taken for granted
At home, make a deeper impression upon children
Than what they are told.

WARBURTON. Stop, Harry, you're mistaken.
I mean, you don't know what I want to tell you.
You may be quite right, but what we are concerned with
Now, is your mother's happiness in the future,
For the time she has to live: not with the past.

HARRY. Oh, is there any difference!
How can we be concerned with the past
And not with the future? or with the future
And not with the past? What I'm telling you
Is very important. Very important.
You must let me explain, and then you can talk.
I don't know why, but just this evening
I feel an overwhelming need for explanation —
But perhaps I only dream that I am talking
And shall wake to find that I have been silent
Or talked to the stone deaf: and the others
Seem to hear something else than what I am saying.
But if you want to talk, at least you can tell me
Something useful. Do you remember my father?

WARBURTON. Why, yes, of course, Harry, but I really don't see
What that has to do with the present occasion
Or with what I have to tell you.

HARRY. What you have to tell me

THE FAMILY REUNION

Is either something that I know already
Or unimportant, or else untrue.
But I want to know more about my father.
I hardly remember him, and I know very well
That I was kept apart from him, till he went away.
We never heard him mentioned, but in some way or another
We felt that he was always here.
But when we would have grasped for him, there was only a vacuum
Surrounded by whispering aunts: Ivy and Violet —
Agatha never came then. Where was my father?

WARBURTON. Harry, there's no good probing for misery.
There was enough once: but what festered
Then, has only left a cautery.
Leave it alone. You know that your mother
And your father were never very happy together:
They separated by mutual consent
And he went to live abroad. You were only a boy
When he died. You would not remember.

HARRY. But now I do remember. Not Arthur or John,
They were too young. But now I remember
A summer day of unusual heat,
The day I lost my butterfly net;
I remember the silence, and the hushed excitement
And the low conversation of triumphant aunts.
It is the conversations not overheard,
Not intended to be heard, with the sidewise looks,
That bring death into the heart of a child.
That was the day he died. Of course.
I mean, I suppose, the day on which the news arrived.

WARBURTON. You overinterpret.
I am sure that your mother always loved him;
There was never the slightest suspicion of scandal.

HARRY. Scandal? who said scandal? I did not.
Yes, I see now. That night, when she kissed me,
I felt the trap close. If you won't tell me,
I must ask Agatha. I never dared before.

WARBURTON. I advise you strongly, not to ask your aunt —
I mean, there is nothing she could tell you. But, Harry,
We can't sit here all the evening, you know;
You will have to have the birthday celebration,

THE FAMILY REUNION

**And your brothers will be here. Won't you let me tell you
What I had to say?**

HARRY. Very well, tell me.

WARBURTON. It's about your mother's health that I wanted to talk to you.

I must tell you, Harry, that although your mother
Is still so alert, so vigorous of mind,
Although she seems as vital as ever —
It is only the force of her personality,
Her indomitable will, that keeps her alive.
I needn't go into technicalities
At the present moment. The whole machine is weak
And running down. Her heart's very feeble.
With care, and avoiding all excitement
She may live several years. A sudden shock
Might send her off at any moment.
If she had been another woman
She would not have lived until now.
Her determination has kept her going:
She has only lived for your return to Wishwood,
For you to take command at Wishwood,
And for that reason, it is most essential
That nothing should disturb or excite her.

HARRY. Well!

WARBURTON. I'm very sorry for you, Harry.

I should have liked to spare you this,
Just now. But there were two reasons
Why you had to know. One is your mother,
To make her happy for the time she has to live.
The other is yourself: the future of Wishwood
Depends on you. I don't like to say this;
But you know that I am a very old friend,
And have always been a party to the family secrets —
You know as well as I do that Arthur and John
Have been a great disappointment to your mother.
John's very steady — but he's not exactly brilliant;
And Arthur has always been rather irresponsible.
Your mother's hopes are all centred on you.

HARRY. Hopes? . . . Tell me

Did you know my father at about my present age?

THE FAMILY REUNION

WARBURTON. Why, yes, Harry, of course I did.

HARRY. What did he look like then? Did he look at all like me?

WARBURTON. Very much like you. Of course there are differences:

But, allowing for the changes in fashion

And your being clean-shaven, very much like you.

And now, Harry, let's talk about yourself.

HARRY. I never saw a photograph. There is no portrait.

WARBURTON. What I want to know is, whether you've been sleeping . . .

[Enter DENMAN]

DENMAN. It's Sergeant Winchell is here, my Lord,

And wants to see your Lordship very urgent,

And Dr. Warburton. He says it's very urgent

Or he wouldn't have troubled you.

HARRY.

I'll see him.

[Exit DENMAN]

WARBURTON. I wonder what he wants. I hope nothing has happened

To either of your brothers.

HARRY.

Nothing can have happened

To either of my brothers. Nothing can happen —

If Sergeant Winchell is real. But Denman saw him.

But what if Denman saw him, and yet he was not real?

That would be worse than anything that has happened.

What if *you* saw him, and . . .

WARBURTON.

Harry! Pull yourself together.

Something may have happened to one of your brothers.

[Enter WINCHELL]

WINCHELL. Good evening, my Lord. Good evening, Doctor.

Many happy . . . Oh, I'm sorry, my Lord,

I was thinking it was your birthday, not her Ladyship's.

HARRY. Her Ladyship's!

[He darts at WINCHELL and seizes him by the shoulders]

He is real, Doctor.

So let us resume the conversation. You, and I

And Winchell. Sit down, Winchell,

And have a glass of port. We were talking of my father.

WINCHELL. Always at your jokes, I see. You don't look a year older

Than when I saw you last, my Lord. But a country sergeant

Doesn't get younger. Thank you, no, my Lord;

I don't find port agrees with the rheumatism.

WARBURTON. For God's sake, Winchell, tell us your business.

THE FAMILY REUNION

His Lordship isn't very well this evening.

WINCHELL.

I understand, Sir.

It'd be the same if it was my birthday —

I beg pardon, I'm forgetting.

If it was my mother's. God rest her soul,

She's been dead these ten years. How is her Ladyship,

If I may ask, my Lord?

HARRY.

Why do you keep asking

About her Ladyship? Do you know or don't you?

I'm not afraid of you.

WINCHELL.

I should hope not, my Lord.

I didn't mean to put myself forward.

But you see, my Lord, I had good reason for asking . . .

HARRY. Well, do you want me to produce her for you?

WINCHELL. Oh no indeed, my Lord, I'd much rather not . . .

HARRY. You mean you think I can't. But I might surprise you;

I think I might be able to give you a shock.

WINCHELL. There's been shock enough for one evening, my Lord:

That's what I've come about.

WARBURTON.

For Heaven's sake, Winchell,

Tell us your business.

WINCHELL.

It's about Mr. John.

HARRY. John!

WINCHELL. Yes, my Lord, I'm sorry.

I thought I'd better have a word with you quiet,

Rather than phone and perhaps disturb her Ladyship.

So I slipped along on my bike. Mostly walking,

What with the fog so thick, or I'd have been here sooner.

I'd telephoned to Dr. Warburton's,

And they told me he was here, and that you'd arrived.

Mr. John's had a bit of an accident

On the West Road, in the fog, coming along

At a pretty smart pace, I fancy, ran into a lorry

Drawn up round the bend. We'll have the driver up for this:

Says he doesn't know this part of the country

And stopped to take his bearings. We've got him at the Arms —

Mr. John, I mean. By a bit of luck

Dr. Owen was there, and looked him over;

Says there's nothing wrong but some nasty cuts

And a bad concussion; says he'll come round

THE FAMILY REUNION

In the morning, most likely, but he mustn't be moved.

But Dr. Owen was anxious that you should have a look at him.

WARBURTON. Quite right, quite right. I'll go and have a look at him.

We must explain to your mother . . .

AMY'S VOICE.

Harry! Harry!

Who's there with you? Is it Arthur or John?

[*Enter AMY, followed severally by VIOLET, IVY, AGATHA, GERALD and CHARLES.*]

Winchell! what are you here for?

WINCHELL. I'm sorry, my Lady, but I've just told the doctor,

It's really nothing but a minor accident.

WARBURTON. It's John has had the accident, Lady Monchensey;

And Winchell tells me Dr. Owen has seen him

And says it's nothing but a slight concussion,

But he mustn't be moved tonight. I'd trust Owen

On a matter like this. You can trust Owen.

We'll bring him up tomorrow; and a few days' rest,

I've no doubt, will be all that he needs.

AMY. Accident? What sort of an accident?

WINCHELL. Coming along in the fog, my Lady,

And he must have been in rather a hurry.

There was a lorry drawn up where it shouldn't be,

Outside of the village, on the West Road.

AMY. Where is he?

WINCHELL. At the Arms, my Lady;

Of course, he hasn't come round yet.

Dr. Owen was there, by a bit of luck.

GERALD. I'll go down and see him, Amy, and come back and report to you.

AMY. I must see for myself. Order the car at once.

WARBURTON. I forbid it, Lady Monchensey.

As your doctor, I forbid you to leave the house tonight.

There is nothing you could do, and out in this weather

At this time of night, I would not answer for the consequences

I am going myself. I will come back and report to you.

AMY. I must see for myself. I do not believe you.

CHARLES. Much better leave it to Warburton, Amy.

Extremely fortunate for us that he's here.

We must put ourselves under Warburton's orders.

WARBURTON. I repeat, Lady Monchensey, that you must not go out.

THE FAMILY REUNION

If you do, I must decline to continue to treat you.

You are only delaying me. I shall return at once. •

AMY. Well, I suppose you are right. But can I trust you?

WARBURTON. You have trusted me a good many years, Lady Monchensey;

This is not the time to begin to doubt me.

Come, Winchell. We can put your bicycle

On the back of my car.

[Exeunt WARBURTON and WINCHELL]

VIOLET. Well, Harry,

I think that you might have had something to say.

Aren't you sorry for your brother? Aren't you aware

Of what is going on? and what it means to your mother?

HARRY. Oh, of course I'm sorry. But from what Winchell says

I don't think the matter can be very serious.

A minor trouble like a concussion

Cannot make very much difference to John.

A brief vacation from the kind of consciousness

That John enjoys, can't make very much difference

To him or to anyone else. If he was ever really conscious,

I should be glad for him to have a breathing spell:

But John's ordinary day isn't much more than breathing.

IVY. Really, Harry! how can you be so callous?

I always thought you were so fond of John.

VIOLET. And if you don't care what happens to John,

You might show some consideration to your mother.

AMY. I do not know very much:

And as I get older, I am coming to think

How little I have ever known.

But I think your remarks are much more inappropriate

Than Harry's.

HARRY. It's only when they see nothing

That people can always show the suitable emotions —

And so far as they feel at all, their emotions are suitable.

They don't understand what it is to be awake,

To be living on several planes at once

Though one cannot speak with several voices at once.

I have all of the rightminded feeling about John

That you consider appropriate. Only, that's not the language

That I choose to be talking. I will not talk yours.

THE FAMILY REUNION

AMY. You looked like your father

When you said that.

HARRY.

I think, mother,

I shall make you lie down. You must be very tired.

[*Exeunt HARRY and AMY*]

VIOLET. I really do not understand Harry's behaviour.

AGATHA. I think it is as well to leave Harry to establish

If he can, some communication with his mother.

VIOLET. I do not seem to be very popular tonight.

CHARLES. Well, there's no sort of use in any of us going —

On a night like this — it's a good three miles;

There's nothing we could do that Warburton can't.

If he's worse than Winchell said, then he'll let us know at once.

GERALD. I am really more afraid of the shock for Amy;

But I think that Warburton understands *that*.

IVY. You are quite right, Gerald, the one thing that matters

Is not to let her see that anyone is worried.

We must carry on as if nothing had happened,

And have the cake and presents.

GERALD.

But I'm worried about Arthur:

He's much more apt than John to get into trouble.

CHARLES. Oh, but Arthur's a brilliant driver.

After all the experience he's had at Brooklands,

He's not likely to get into trouble.

GERALD. A brilliant driver, but more reckless.

IVY. Yet I remember, when they were boys,

Arthur was always the more adventurous

But John was the one that had the accidents,

Somehow, just because he *was* the slow one.

He was always the one to fall off the pony,

Or out of a tree — and always on his head.

VIOLET. But a year ago, Arthur took me out in his car,

And I told him I would never go out with him again.

Not that I wanted to go with him at all —

Though of course he meant well — but I think an open car

Is so undignified: you're blown about so,

And you feel so conspicuous, lolling back

And so near the street, and everyone staring;

And the pace he went at was simply terrifying.

I said I would rather walk: and I did.

THE FAMILY REUNION

GERALD. Walk? where to?

VIOLET. He started out to take me to Cheltenham;

But I stopped him somewhere in Chiswick, I think.

Anyway, the district was unfamiliar

And I had the greatest trouble in getting home.

I am sure he meant well. But I do think he is reckless.

GERALD. I wonder how much Amy knows about Arthur?

CHARLES. More than she cares to mention, I imagine.

[Enter HARRY]

HARRY. Mother is asleep, I think: it's strange how the old

Can drop off to sleep in the middle of calamity

Like children, or like hardened campaigners. She looked

Very much as she must have looked when she was a child.

You've been holding a meeting — the usual family inquest

On the characters of all the junior members?

Or engaged in predicting the minor event,

Engaged in foreseeing the minor disaster?

You go on trying to think of each thing separately,

Making small things important, so that everything

May be unimportant, a slight deviation

From some imaginary course that life ought to take,

That you call normal. What you call the normal

Is merely the unreal and the unimportant.

I was like that in a way, so long as I could think

Even of my own life as an isolated ruin,

A casual bit of waste in an orderly universe.

But it begins to seem just part of some huge disaster,

Some monstrous mistake and aberration

Of all men, of the world, which I cannot put in order.

If you only knew the years that I have had to live

Since I came home, a few hours ago, to Wishwood.

VIOLET. I will make no observations on what you say, Harry;

My comments are not always welcome in this family.

[Enter DENMAN]

DENMAN. Excuse me, Miss Ivy. There's a trunk call for you.

IVY. A trunk call? for me? why, who can want me?

DENMAN. He wouldn't give his name, Miss; but it's Mr. Arthur.

IVY. Arthur! Oh dear, I'm afraid *he's* had an accident.

[Exeunt IVY and DENMAN]

VIOLET. When it's Ivy that he's asking for, I expect the worst.

THE FAMILY REUNION

AGATHA. Whatever you have learned, Harry, you must remember
That there is always more: we cannot rest in being
The impatient spectators of malice or stupidity.
We must try to penetrate the other private worlds
Of make-believe and fear. To rest in our own suffering
Is evasion of suffering. We must learn to suffer more.

VIOLET. Agatha's remarks are invariably pointed.

HARRY. Do you think that I believe what I said just now?

That was only what I should like to believe.

I was talking in abstractions: and you answered in abstractions.

I have a private puzzle. Were they simply outside,

I might escape somewhere, perhaps. Were they simply inside

I could cheat them perhaps with the aid of Dr. Warburton —

Or any other doctor, who would be another Warburton,

If you decided to set another doctor on me.

But this is too real for your words to alter.

Oh, there *must* be another way of talking

That would get us somewhere. You don't understand me.

You can't understand me. It's not being alone

That is the horror — to be alone with the horror.

What matters is the filthiness. I can clean my skin,

Purify my life, void my mind,

But always the filthiness, that lies a little deeper . . .

[*Enter IVY*]

IVY. Where is there an evening paper?

GERALD.

Why, what's the matter.

IVY. Somebody, look for Arthur in the evening paper.

That was Arthur, ringing up from London:

The connection was so bad, I could hardly hear him,

And his voice was very queer. It seems that Arthur too

Has had an accident. I don't think he's hurt,

But he says that he hasn't got the use of his car,

And he missed the last train, so he's coming up tomorrow;

And he said there was something about it in the paper,

But it's all a mistake. And not to tell his mother.

VIOLET. What's the use of asking for an evening paper?

You know as well as I do, at this distance from London

Nobody's likely to have this evening's paper.

CHARLES. Stop, I think I bought a lunch edition

Before I left St. Pancras. If I did, it's in my overcoat.

THE FAMILY REUNION

I'll see if it's there. There might be something in that.

[Exit]

GERALD. Well, I said that Arthur was every bit as likely
To have an accident as John. And it wasn't John's fault,
I don't believe. John is unlucky,
But Arthur is definitely reckless.

VIOLET. I think these racing cars ought to be prohibited.

[Re-enter CHARLES, with a newspaper]

CHARLES. Yes, there is a paragraph . . . I'm glad to say
It's not very conspicuous . . .

GERALD. There'll have been more in the later editions.
You'd better read it to us.

CHARLES [reads].

'Peer's Brother in Motor Smash

The Hon. Arthur Gerald Charles Piper, younger brother of Lord Monchensey, who ran into and demolished a roundsman's cart in Ebury Street early on the morning of January 1st, was fined £50 and costs to-day, and forbidden to drive a car for the next twelve months.

While trying to extricate his car from the collision, Mr. Piper reversed into a shop-window. When challenged, Mr. Piper said: "I thought it was all open country about here" —'

GERALD. Where?

CHARLES. In Ebury Street. 'The police stated that at the time of the accident Mr. Piper was being pursued by a patrol, and was travelling at the rate of 66 miles an hour. When asked why he did not stop when signalled by the police car, he said: "I thought you were having a game with me."'

GERALD. This is what the Communists make capital out of.

CHARLES. There's a little more. 'The Piper family . . .' no, we needn't read that.

VIOLET. This is just what I expected. But if Agatha

Is going to moralise about it, I shall scream.

GERALD. It's going to be awkward, explaining this to Amy.

IVY. Poor Arthur! I'm sure that you're being much too hard on him.

CHARLES. In my time, these affairs were kept out of the papers;
But nowadays, there's no such thing as privacy.

CHORUS. In an old house there is always listening, and more is heard
than is spoken.

THE FAMILY REUNION

And what is spoken remains in the room, waiting for the future to hear it.

And whatever happens began in the past, and presses hard on the future.

The agony in the curtained bedroom, whether of birth or of dying, Gathers in to itself all the voices of the past, and projects them into the future.

The treble voices on the lawn

The mowing of hay in summer

The dogs and the old pony

The stumble and the wail of little pain

The chopping of wood in autumn

And the singing in the kitchen

And the steps at night in the corridor

The moment of sudden loathing

And the season of stifled sorrow

The whisper, the transparent deception

The keeping up of appearances

The making the best of a bad job

All twined and tangled together, all are recorded.

There is no avoiding these things

And we know nothing of exorcism

And whether in Argos or England

There are certain inflexible laws

Unalterable, in the nature of music.

There is nothing at all to be done about it,

There is nothing to do about anything,

And now it is nearly time for the news

We must listen to the weather report

And the international catastrophes.

[*Exeunt* CHORUS]

Scene II

HARRY, AGATHA

HARRY. John will recover, be what he always was ;
Arthur again be sober, though not for very long ;
And everything will go on as before. These mild surprises
Should be in the routine of normal life at Wishwood.
John is the only one of us I can conceive
As settling down to make himself at home at Wishwood,
Make a dull marriage, marry some woman stupider —
Stupider than himself. He can resist the influence
Of Wishwood, being unconscious, living in gentle motion
Of horses, and right visits to the right neighbours
At the right times ; and be an excellent landlord.

AGATHA. What is in your mind, Harry?
I can guess about the past and what you mean about the future ;
But a present is missing, needed to connect them.
You may be afraid that I would not understand you,
You may also be afraid of being understood,
Try not to regard it as an explanation.

HARRY. I still have to learn exactly what their meaning is.
At the beginning, eight years ago,
I felt, at first, that sense of separation,
Of isolation unredeemable, irrevocable —
It's eternal, or gives a knowledge of eternity,
Because it feels eternal while it lasts. That is one hell.
Then the numbness came to cover it — that is another —
That was the second hell of not being there,
The degradation of being parted from my self,
From the self which persisted only as an eye, seeing.
All this last year, I could not fit myself together :
When I was inside the old dream, I felt all the same emotion
Or lack of emotion, as before : the same loathing
Diffused, I not a person, in a world not of persons

THE FAMILY REUNION

But only of contaminating presences.
And then I had no horror of my action,
I only felt the repetition of it
Over and over. When I was outside,
I could associate nothing of it with myself,
Though nothing else was real. I thought foolishly
That when I got back to Wishwood, as I had left it,
Everything would fall into place. But *they* prevent it.
I still have to find out what their meaning is.
Here I have been finding
A misery long forgotten, and a new torture,
The shadow of something behind our meagre childhood,
Some origin of wretchedness. Is that what they would show
me?

And now I want you to tell me about my father.

AGATHA. What do you want to know about your father?

HARRY. If I knew, then I should not have to ask.

You know what I want to know, and that is enough:
Warburton told me that, though he did not mean to.
What I want to know is something I need to know,
And only you can tell me. I know that much.

AGATHA. I had to fight for many years to win my dispossession,
And many years to keep it. What people know me as,
The efficient principal of a women's college —
That is the surface. There is a deeper
Organisation, which your question disturbs.

HARRY. When I know, I know that in some way I shall find
That I have always known it. And that will be better.

AGATHA. I will try to tell you. I hope I have the strength.

HARRY. I have thought of you as the completely strong,
The liberated from the human wheel.
So I looked to you for strength. Now I think it is
A common pursuit of liberation.

AGATHA. Your father might have lived — or so I see him —
An exceptionally cultivated country squire,
Reading, sketching, playing on the flute,
Something of an oddity to his county neighbours,
But not neglecting public duties.
He hid his strength beneath unusual weakness,
The diffidence of a solitary man:

THE FAMILY REUNION

Where he was weak he recognised your mother's power,
And yielded to it.

HARRY. There was no ecstasy.

Tell me now, who were my parents?

AGATHA. Your father and your mother.

HARRY. You tell me nothing.

AGATHA. The dead man whom you have assumed to be your father,
And my sister whom you acknowledge as your mother:
There is no mystery here.

HARRY. What then?

AGATHA. You see your mother as identified with this house —

It was not always so. There were many years
Before she succeeded in making terms with Wishwood,
Until she took your father's place, and reached the point where
Wishwood supported her, and she supported Wishwood.
At first it was a vacancy. A man and a woman
Married, alone in a lonely country house together,
For three years childless, learning the meaning
Of loneliness. Your mother wanted a sister here
Always. I was the youngest: I was then
An undergraduate at Oxford. I came
Once for a long vacation. I remember
A summer day of unusual heat
For this cold country.

HARRY. And then?

AGATHA. There are hours when there seems to be no past or future,
Only a present moment of pointed light
When you want to burn. When you stretch out your hand
To the flames. They only come once,
Thank God, that kind. Perhaps there is another kind,
I believe, across a whole Thibet of broken stones
That lie, fang up, a lifetime's march. I have believed this.

HARRY. I have known neither.

AGATHA. The autumn came too soon, not soon enough.

The rain and wind had not shaken your father
Awake yet. I found him thinking
How to get rid of your mother. What simple plots!
He was not suited to the role of murderer.

HARRY. In what way did he wish to murder her?

AGATHA. Oh, a dozen foolish ways, each one abandoned

THE FAMILY REUNION

For something more ingenious. You were due in three months' time;
You would not have been born in that event: I stopped him.
I can take no credit for a little common sense,
He would have bungled it.

I did not want to kill *you*!

You to be killed! What were you then? only a thing called 'life' —
Something that should have been *mine*, as I felt then.
Most people would not have felt that compunction
If they felt no other. But I wanted you!
If that had happened, I knew I should have carried
Death in life, death through lifetime, death in my womb.
I felt that you were in some way mine!
And that in any case I should have no other child.

HARRY. And have me. That is the way things happen.
Everything is true in a different sense,
A sense that would have seemed meaningless before.
Everything tends towards reconciliation
As the stone falls, as the tree falls. And in the end
That is the completion which at the beginning
Would have seemed the ruin.
Perhaps my life has only been a dream
Dreamt through me by the minds of others. Perhaps
I only dreamt I pushed her.

AGATHA. So I had supposed. What of it?
What we have written is not a story of detection,
Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation.
It is possible that you have not known what sin
You shall expiate, or whose, or why. It is certain
That the knowledge of it must precede the expiation.
It is possible that sin may strain and struggle
In its dark instinctive birth, to come to consciousness
And so find expurgation. It is possible
You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,
Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.
Indeed it is possible. You may learn hereafter,
Moving alone through flames of ice, chosen
To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer.

HARRY. Look, I do not know why,
I feel happy for a moment, as if I had come home.
It is quite irrational, but now

THE FAMILY REUNION

I feel quite happy, as if happiness
Did not consist in getting what one wanted
Or in getting rid of what can't be got rid of
But in a different vision. This is like an end.

AGATHA. And a beginning. Harry, my dear,
I feel very tired, as only the old feel.
The young feel tired at the end of an action —
The old, at the beginning. It is as if
I had been living all these years upon my capital,
Instead of earning my spiritual income daily:
And I am old, to start again to make my living.

HARRY. But you are not unhappy, just now?

AGATHA. What does the word mean?

There's relief from a burden that I carried,
And exhaustion at the moment of relief.
The burden's yours now, yours
The burden of all the family. And I am a little frightened.

HARRY. You, frightened! I can hardly imagine it.
I wish I had known — but that was impossible.
I only now begin to have some understanding
Of you, and of all of us. Family affection
Was a kind of formal obligation, a duty
Only noticed by its neglect. One had that part to play.
After such training, I could endure, these ten years,
Playing a part that had been imposed upon me;
And I returned to find another one made ready —
The book laid out, lines underscored, and the costume
Ready to be put on. But it is very odd:
When other people seemed so strong, their apparent strength
Stifled my decision. Now I see
I might even become fonder of my mother —
More compassionate at least — by understanding.
But she would not like that. Now I see
I have been wounded in a war of phantoms,
Not by human beings — they have no more power than I.
The things I thought were real are shadows, and the real
Are what I thought were private shadows. O that awful privacy
Of the insane mind! Now I can live in public.
Liberty is a different kind of pain from prison.

AGATHA. I only looked through the little door

THE FAMILY REUNION

When the sun was shining on the rose-garden:
And heard in the distance tiny voices
And then a black raven flew over.
And then I was only my own feet walking
Away, down a concrete corridor
In a dead air. Only feet walking
And sharp heel scraping. Over and under
Echo and noise of feet.
I was only the feet, and the eye
Seeing the feet: the unwinking eye
Fixing the movement. Over and under.

HARRY. In and out, in an endless drift
Of shrieking forms in a circular desert
Weaving with contagion of putrescent embraces
On dissolving bone. In and out, the movement
Until the chain broke, and I was left
Under the single eye above the desert.

AGATHA. Up and down, through the stone passages
Of an immense and empty hospital
Pervaded by a smell of disinfectant,
Looking straight ahead, passing barred windows.
Up and down. Until the chain breaks.

HARRY. To and fro, dragging my feet
Among inner shadows in the smoky wilderness,
Trying to avoid the clasping branches
And the giant lizard. To and fro.
Until the chain breaks.

The chain breaks,
The wheel stops, and the noise of machinery,
And the desert is cleared, under the judicial sun
Of the final eye, and the awful evacuation
Cleanses.

I was not there, you were not there, only our phantasms
And what did not happen is as true as what did happen
O my dear, and you walked through the little door
And I ran to meet you in the rose-garden.

AGATHA. This is the next moment. This is the beginning.
We do not pass twice through the same door
Or return to the door through which we did not pass.
I have seen the first stage: relief from what happened

THE FAMILY REUNION

Is also relief from that unfulfilled craving
Flattered in sleep, and deceived in waking.

You have a long journey.

HARRY. Not yet! not yet! this is the first time that I have been free
From the ring of ghosts with joined hands, from the pursuers,
And come into a quiet place.

Why is it so quiet?

Do you feel a kind of stirring underneath the air?
Do you? don't you? a communication, a scent
Direct to the brain . . . but not just as before,
Not quite like, not the same . . .

[*The EUMENIDES appear*]

and this time

You cannot think that I am surprised to see you.
And you shall not think that I am afraid to see you.
'This time, you are real, this time, you are outside me,
And just endurable. I know that you are ready,
Ready to leave Wishwood, and I am going with you.
You followed me here, where I thought I should escape you —
No! you were already here before I arrived.
Now I see at last that I am following you,
And I know that there can be only one itinerary
And one destination. Let us lose no time. I will follow.

[*The curtains close. AGATHA goes to the window, in a somnambular fashion, and opens the curtains, disclosing the empty embrasure. She steps into the place which the EUMENIDES had occupied.*]

AGATHA. A curse comes to being
As a child is formed.
In both, the incredible
Becomes the actual
Without our intention
Knowing what is intended.
A curse is like a child, formed
In a moment of unconsciousness
In an accidental bed
Or under an elder tree
According to the phase
Of the determined moon.
A curse is like a child, formed
To grow to maturity:

THE FAMILY REUNION

Accident is design
And design is accident
In a cloud of unknowing.
O my child, my curse,
You shall be fulfilled:
The knot shall be unknotted
And the crooked made straight.

[She moves back into the room]

What have I been saying? I think I was saying
That you have a long journey. You have nothing to stay for.
Think of it as like a children's treasure hunt:
Here you have found a clue, hidden in the obvious place.
Delay, and it is lost. Love compels cruelty
To those who do not understand love.
What you have wished to know, what you have learned
Mean the end of a relation, make it impossible.
You did not intend this, I did not intend it,
No one intended, but . . . You must go.

HARRY. Shall we ever meet again?

AGATHA. Shall we ever meet again?

And who will meet again? Meeting is for strangers. Meeting is for those who do not know each other.

HARRY. I know that I have made a decision
In a moment of clarity, and now I feel dull again.
I only know that I made a decision
Which your words echo. I am still befouled,
But I know there is only one way out of defilement —
Which leads in the end to reconciliation.
And I know that I must go.

AGATHA. You must go.

[Enter AMY]

AMY. What are you saying to Harry? He has only arrived,
And you tell him to go?

AGATHA. He shall go.

AMY. He shall go? and who are you to say he shall go?
I think I know well enough why you wish him to go.

AGATHA. I wish nothing. I only say what I know must happen.

AMY. You only say what you intended to happen.

HARRY. Oh, mother,
This is not to do with Agatha, any more than with the rest of you.

THE FAMILY REUNION

My advice has come from quite a different quarter,
But I cannot explain that to you now. Only be sure
That I know what I am doing, and what I must do,
And that it is the best thing for everybody.
But at present, I cannot explain it to anyone:
I do not know the words in which to explain it —
That is what makes it harder. You must just believe me,
Until I come again.

AMY. But why are you going?

HARRY. I can only speak
And you cannot hear me. I can only speak
So you may not think I conceal an explanation,
And to tell you that I would have liked to explain.

AMY. Why should Agatha know, and I not be allowed to?

HARRY. I do not know whether Agatha knows
Or how much she knows. Any knowledge she may have —
It was not I who told her . . . All this year,
This last year, I have been in flight
But always in ignorance of invisible pursuers.
Now I know that all my life has been a flight
And phantoms fed upon me while I fled. Now I know
That the last apparent refuge, the safe shelter,
That is where one meets them. That is the way of spectres . . .

AMY. There is no one here!

No one, but your family!

HARRY. And now I know
That my business is not to run away, but to pursue,
Not to avoid being found, but to seek.
I would not have chosen this way, had there been any other!
It is at once the hardest thing, and the only thing possible.
Now they will lead me. I shall be safe with them;
I am not safe here.

AMY. So you *will* run away.

AGATHA. In a world of fugitives
The person taking the opposite direction
Will appear to run away.

AMY. I was speaking to Harry.

HARRY. It is very hard, when one has just recovered sanity,
And not yet assured in possession, that is when
One begins to seem the maddest to other people.

THE FAMILY REUNION

It is hard for you too, mother, it is indeed harder,
Not to understand.

AMY. Where are you going?

HARRY. I shall have to learn. That is still unsettled.

I have not yet had the precise directions.
Where does one go from a world of insanity?
Somewhere on the other side of despair.
To the worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation,
A stony sanctuary and a primitive altar,
The heat of the sun and the icy vigil,
A care over lives of humble people,
The lesson of ignorance, of incurable diseases.
Such things are possible. It is love and terror
Of what waits and wants me, and will not let me fall.
Let the cricket chirp. John shall be the master.
All I have is his. No harm can come to him.
What would destroy me will be life for John,
I am responsible for him. Why I have this election
I do not understand. It must have been preparing always,
And I see it was what I always wanted. Strength demanded
That seems too much, is just strength enough given.
I must follow the bright angels.

[Exit]

Scene III

AMY, AGATHA

AMY. I was a fool, to ask you again to Wishwood;
But I thought, thirty-five years is long, and death is an end,
And I thought that time might have made a change in Agatha —
It has made enough in *me*. Thirty-five years ago
You took my husband from me. Now you take my son.

AGATHA. What did I take? nothing that you ever had.
What did I get? thirty years of solitude,
Alone, among women, in a women's college,
Trying not to dislike women. Thirty years in which to think.
Do you suppose that I wanted to return to Wishwood?

AMY. The more rapacious, to take what I never had;
The more unpardonable, to taunt me with not having it.
Had you taken what I had, you would have left me at least a memory
Of something to live upon. You knew that you took everything
Except the walls, the furniture, the acres;
Leaving nothing — but what I could breed for myself,
What I could plant here. Seven years I kept him,
For the sake of the future, a discontented ghost,
In his own house. What of the humiliation,
Of the chilly pretences in the silent bedroom,
Forcing sons upon an unwilling father?
Dare you think what that does to one? Try to think of it.
I would have sons, if I could not have a husband:
Then I let him go. I abased myself.
Did I show any weakness, any self-pity?
I forced myself to the purposes of Wishwood;
I even asked you back, for visits, after he was gone,
So that there might be no ugly rumours.
You thought I did not know!
You may be close, but I always saw through *him*.
And now it is my son.

THE FAMILY REUNION

AGATHA. I know one thing, Amy:
That you have never changed. And perhaps I have not.
I thought that I had, until this evening.
But at least I wanted to. Now I must begin.
There is nothing more difficult. But you are just the same:
Just as voracious for what you cannot have
Because you repel it.

AMY. I prepared the situation
For us to be reconciled, because of Harry,
Because of his mistakes, because of his unhappiness,
Because of the misery that he has left behind him,
Because of the waste. I wanted to obliterate
His past life, and have nothing except to remind him
Of the years when he had been a happy boy at Wishwood;
For his future success.

AGATHA. Success is relative:
It is what we can make of the mess we have made of things,
It is what he can make, not what you would make for him.

AMY. Success is one thing, what you would make for him
Is another. I call it failure. Your fury for possession
Is only the stronger for all these years of abstinence.
Thirty-five years ago you took my husband from me
And now you take my son.

AGATHA. Why should we quarrel for what neither can have?
If neither has ever had a husband or a son
We have no ground for argument.

AMY. Who set you up to judge? what, if you please,
Gives *you* the power to know what is best for Harry?
What gave you this influence to persuade him
To abandon his duty, his family and his happiness?
Who has planned his good? is it you or I?
Thirty-five years designing his life,
Eight years watching, without him, at Wishwood,
Years of bitterness and disappointment.
What share had you in this? what have you given?
And now at the moment of success against failure,
When I felt assured of his settlement and happiness,
You who took my husband, now you take my son.
You take him from Wishwood, you take him from me,
You take him . . .

THE FAMILY REUNION

[Enter MARY]

MARY. Excuse me, Cousin Amy. I have just seen Denman.

She came to tell me that Harry is leaving:

Downing told her. He has got the car out.

What is the matter?

AMY. That woman there,

She has persuaded him: I do not know how.

I have been always trying to make myself believe

That he was not such a weakling as his father

In the hands of any unscrupulous woman.

I have no influence over him; *you* can try,

But you will not succeed: she has some spell

That works from generation to generation.

MARY. Is Harry really going?

AGATHA. He is going.

But that is not my spell, it is none of my doing:

I have only watched and waited. In this world

It is inexplicable, the resolution is in another.

MARY. Oh, but it is the danger comes from another!

Can you not stop him? Cousin Agatha, stop him!

You do not know what I have seen and what I know!

He is in great danger, I know that, don't ask me,

You would not believe me, but I tell you I know.

You must keep him here, you must not let him leave.

I do not know what must be done, what can be done,

Even here, but elsewhere, everywhere, he is in danger.

I will stay or I will go, whichever is better;

I do not care what happens to me,

But Harry must not go. Cousin Agatha!

AGATHA. Here the danger, here the death, here, not elsewhere;

Elsewhere no doubt is agony, renunciation,

But birth and life. Harry has crossed the frontier

Beyond which safety and danger have a different meaning.

And he cannot return. That is his privilege.

For those who live in this world, this world only,

Do you think that I would take the responsibility

Of tempting them over the border? No one could, no one who knows.

No one who has the least suspicion of what is to be found there.

But Harry has been led across the frontier: he must follow;

THE FAMILY REUNION

For him the death is now only on this side,
For him, danger and safety have another meaning.
They have made this clear. And I who have seen them must believe them.

MARY. Oh! . . . so . . . *you* have seen them too!

AGATHA. We must all go, each in his own direction,
You, and I, and Harry. You and I,
My dear, may very likely meet again
In our wanderings in the neutral territory
Between two worlds.

MARY. Then you *will* help me!
You remember what I said to you this evening?
I knew that I was right: you made me wait for this —
Only for this. I suppose I did not really mean it
Then, but I mean it now. Of course it was much too late
Then, for anything to come for me: I should have known it;
It was all over, I believe, before it began;
But I deceived myself. It takes so many years
To learn that one is dead! So you must help me.
I will go. But I suppose it is much too late
Now, to try to get a fellowship?

AMY. So you will all leave me!
An old woman alone in a damned house.
I will let the walls crumble. Why should I worry
To keep the tiles on the roof, combat the endless weather,
Resist the wind? fight with increasing taxes
And unpaid rents and tithes? nourish investments
With wakeful nights and patient calculations
With the solicitor, the broker, agent? Why should I?
It is no concern of the body in the tomb
To bother about the upkeep. Let the wind and rain do that.

[*While AMY has been speaking, HARRY has entered, dressed for departure.*]

HARRY. But, mother, you will always have Arthur and John
To worry about: not that John is any worry —
The destined and the perfect master of Wishwood,
The satisfactory son. And as for me,
I am the last you need to worry about;
I have my course to pursue, and I am safe from normal dangers
If I pursue it. I cannot account for this
But it is so, mother. Until I come again.

THE FAMILY REUNION

AMY. If you go now, I shall never see you again.

[*Meanwhile VIOLET, GERALD and CHARLES have entered*]

CHARLES. Where is Harry going? What is the matter?

AMY. Ask Agatha.

GERALD. Why, what's the matter? Where is he going?

AMY. Ask Agatha.

VIOLET. I cannot understand at all. Why is he leaving?

AMY. Ask Agatha.

VIOLET. Really, it sometimes seems to me

That I am the only sane person in this house.

Your behaviour all seems to me quite unaccountable.

What *has* happened, Amy?

AMY. Harry is going away — to become a missionary.

HARRY. But . . . !

CHARLES. A missionary! that's never happened in our family!

And why in such a hurry? Before you make up your mind . . .

VIOLET. You can't really think of *living* in a tropical climate!

GERALD. There's nothing wrong with a tropical climate —

But you have to go in for some sort of training;

The medical knowledge is the first thing.

I've met with missionaries, often enough —

Some of them very decent fellows. A maligned profession.

They're sometimes very useful, knowing the natives,

Though occasionally troublesome. But you'll have to learn the language

And several dialects. It means a lot of preparation.

VIOLET. And you need some religious qualification!

I think you should consult the vicar . . .

GERALD. And don't forget

That you'll need various inoculations —

That depends on where you're going.

CHARLES. Such a thing

Has never happened in our family.

VIOLET. I cannot understand it.

HARRY. I never said that I was going to be a missionary.

I would explain, but you would none of you believe it;

If you believed it, still you would not understand.

You can't know why I am going. You have not seen

What I have seen. Oh why should you make it so ridiculous

Just now? I only want, please,

THE FAMILY REUNION

As little fuss as possible. You must get used to it;
Meanwhile, I apologise for my bad manners.
But if you *could* understand you would be quite happy about it,
So I shall say good-bye, until we meet again.

GERALD. Well, if you are determined, Harry, we must accept it;
But it's a bad night, and you will have to be careful.
You're taking Downing with you?

HARRY. Oh, yes, I'm taking Downing.
You need not fear that I am in any danger
Of such accidents as happen to Arthur and John:
Take care of *them*. My address, mother,
Will be care of the bank in London until you hear from me.
Good-bye, mother.

AMY. Good-bye, Harry.

HARRY. Good-bye.

AGATHA. Good-bye.

HARRY. Good-bye, Mary.

MARY. Good-bye, Harry. Take care of yourself.

[Exit HARRY]

AMY. At my age, I only just begin to apprehend the truth
About things too late to mend: and that is to be old.
Nevertheless, I am glad if I can come to know them.
I always wanted too much for my children ,
More than life can give. And now I am punished for it.
Gerald! you are the stupidest person in this room,
Violet, you are the most malicious in a harmless way;
I prefer your company to that of any of the others
Just to help me to the next room. Where I can lie down.
Then you can leave me.

GERALD. Oh, certainly, Amy.

VIOLET. I do not understand
A single thing that's happened.

[Exeunt AMY, VIOLET, GERALD]

CHARLES. It's very odd,
But I am beginning to feel, just beginning to feel
That there is something I *could* understand, if I were told it.
But I'm not sure that I want to know. I suppose I'm getting old:
Old age came softly up to now. I felt safe enough;
And now I don't feel safe. As if the earth should open
Right to the centre, as I was about to cross Pall Mall.

THE FAMILY REUNION

I thought that life could bring no further surprises;
But I remember now, that I am always surprised
By the bull-dog in the Burlington Arcade.
What if every moment were like that, if one were awake?
You both seem to know more about this than I do.

[Enter DOWNING, *hurriedly, in chauffeur's costume*]

DOWNING. Oh, excuse me, Miss, excuse me, Mr. Charles:

His Lordship sent me back because he remembered
He thinks he left his cigarette-case on the table.
Oh, there it is. Thank you. Good night, Miss; good night,
Miss Mary; good night, Sir.

MARY. Downing, will you promise never to leave his Lordship
While you are away?

DOWNING. Oh, certainly, Miss;

I'll never leave him so long as he requires me.

MARY. But he will need you. You must never leave him.

DOWNING. You may think it laughable, what I'm going to say —

But it's not really strange, Miss, when you come to look at it:

After all these years that I've been with him

I think I understand his Lordship better than anybody;

And I have a kind of feeling that his Lordship won't need me

Very long now. I can't give you any reasons.

But to show you what I mean, though you'd hardly credit it,

I've always said, whatever happened to his Lordship

Was just a kind of preparation for something else.

I've no gift of language, but I'm sure of what I mean:

We most of us seem to live according to circumstance,

But with people like him, there's something inside them

That accounts for what happens to them. You get a feeling of it.

So I seem to know beforehand, when something's going to happen,

And it seems quite natural, being his Lordship.

And that's why I say now, I have a feeling

That he won't want me long, and he won't want anybody.

AGATHA. And, Downing, if his behaviour seems unaccountable

At times, you mustn't worry about that.

He is every bit as sane as you or I,

He sees the world as clearly as you or I see it,

It is only that he has seen a great deal more than that,

And we have seen them too — Miss Mary and I.

DOWNING. I understand you, Miss. And if I may say so,

THE FAMILY REUNION

Now that you've raised the subject, I'm most relieved —
If you understand my meaning. I thought that was the reason
We was off tonight. In fact, I half expected it,
So I had the car all ready. You mean them ghosts, Miss!
I wondered when his Lordship would get round to seeing them —
And so you've seen them too! They must have given you a turn!
They did me, at first. You soon get used to them.
Of course, I knew they was to do with his Lordship,
And not with me, so I could see them cheerful-like,
In a manner of speaking. There's no harm in *them*,
I'll take my oath. Will that be all, Miss?

AGATHA. That will be all, thank you, Downing. We mustn't keep you;
His Lordship will be wondering why you've been so long.

[Exit DOWNING. Enter IVY]

IVY. Where is Downing going? where is Harry?
Look. Here's a telegram come from Arthur;

[Enter GERALD and VIOLET]

I wonder why he sent it, after telephoning.
Shall I read it to you? I was wondering
Whether to show it to Amy or not.

[Reads]

'Regret delayed business in town many happy returns see you to-morrow many happy returns hurrah love Arthur.'

I mean, after what we know of what did happen,
Do you think Amy ought to see it?

VIOLET. No, certainly not.

You do not know what has been going on, Ivy.
And if you did, you would not understand it.
I do not understand, so how could you? Amy is not well;
And she is resting.

IVY. Oh, I'm sorry. But can't you explain?
Why do you all look so peculiar? I think I might be allowed
To know what has happened.

AMY'S VOICE. Agatha! Mary! come!
The clock has stopped in the dark!

[Exeunt AGATHA and MARY. Pause. Enter Warburton]

WARBURTON. Well! it's a filthy night to be out in.
That's why I've been so long, going and coming.
But I'm glad to say that John is getting on nicely;
It wasn't so serious as Winchell made out,

THE FAMILY REUNION

And we'll have him up here in the morning.

I hope Lady Monchenscy hasn't been worrying?

I'm anxious to relieve her mind. Why, what's the trouble?

[Enter MARY]

MARY. Dr. Warburton!

WARBURTON. Excuse me.

[Exeunt MARY and WARBURTON]

CHORUS. We do not like to look out of the same window, and see quite a different landscape.

We do not like to climb a stair, and find that it takes us down.

We do not like to walk out of a door, and find ourselves back in the same room.

We do not like the maze in the garden, because it too closely resembles the maze in the brain.

We do not like what happens when we are awake, because it too closely resembles what happens when we are asleep.

We understand the ordinary business of living,

We know how to work the machine,

We can usually avoid accidents,

We are insured against fire,

Against larceny and illness,

Against defective plumbing,

But not against the act of God.

We know various spells and enchantments.

And minor forms of sorcery,

Divination and chiromancy,

Specifics against insomnia,

Lumbago, and the loss of money.

But the circle of our understanding

Is a very restricted area.

Except for a limited number

Of strictly practical purposes

We do not know what we are doing;

And even, when you think of it,

We do not know much about thinking.

What is happening outside of the circle?

And what is the meaning of happening?

What ambush lies beyond the heather

And behind the Standing Stones?

Beyond the Heaviside Layer

THE FAMILY REUNION

And behind the smiling moon?
And what is being done to us?
And what are we, and what are we doing?
To each and all of these questions
There is no conceivable answer.
We have suffered far more than a personal loss —
We have lost our way in the dark.

IVY. I shall have to stay till after the funeral: will my ticket to London still be valid?

GERALD. I do not look forward with pleasure to dealing with Arthur and John in the morning.

VIOLET. We must wait for the will to be read. I shall send a wire in the morning.

CHARLES. I fear that my mind is not what it was — or was it? — and yet I think that I might understand.

ALL. But we must adjust ourselves to the moment: we must do the right thing.

[*Exeunt*]

[*Enter, from one door, AGATHA and MARY, and set a small portable table. From another door, enter DENMAN carrying a birthday cake with lighted candles, which she sets on the table. Exit DENMAN. AGATHA and MARY walk slowly in single file round and round the table, clockwise. At each revolution they blow out a few candles, so that their last words are spoken in the dark.*]

AGATHA. A curse is slow in coming
To complete fruition
It cannot be hurried
And it cannot be delayed

MARY. It cannot be diverted
An attempt to divert it
Only implicates others
At the day of consummation

AGATHA. A curse is a power
Not subject to reason
Each curse has its course
Its own way of expiation
Follow follow

MARY. Not in the day time
And in the hither world
Where we know what we are doing

THE FAMILY REUNION

There is not its operation
Follow follow

AGATHA. But in the night time
And in the nether world
Where the meshes we have woven
Bind us to each other
Follow follow

MARY. A curse is written
On the under side of things
Behind the smiling mirror
And behind the smiling moon
Follow follow

AGATHA. This way the pilgrimage
Of expiation
Round and round the circle
Completing the charm
So the knot be unknotted
The crossed be uncrossed
The crooked be made straight
And the curse be ended
By intercession
By pilgrimage
By those who depart
In several directions
For their own redemption
And that of the departed —

May they rest in peace.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Persons

EDWARD CHAMBERLAYNE

JULIA (MRS. SHUTTLETHWAITE)

CELIA COPLESTONE

ALEXANDER MACCOLGIE GIBBS

PETER QUILPE

AN UNIDENTIFIED GUEST, *later identified as*

SIR HENRY HARCOURT-REILLY

LAVINIA CHAMBERLAYNE

A NURSE-SECRETARY

TWO CATERER'S MEN

The scene is laid in London

Act One. Scene 1

The drawing-room of the Chamberlaynes' London flat. Early evening.

EDWARD CHAMBERLAYNE, JULIA SHUTTLETHWAITE, CELIA
COPLESTONE, PETER QUILPE, ALEXANDER MACCOLGIE GIBBS,
and an UNIDENTIFIED GUEST.

ALEX. You've missed the point completely, Julia:

There *were* no tigers. *That* was the point.

JULIA. Then what were you doing, up in a tree:

You and the Maharaja?

ALEX. My dear Julia!

It's perfectly hopeless. You haven't been listening.

PETER. You'll have to tell us all over again, Alex.

ALEX. I never tell the same story twice.

JULIA. But I'm still waiting to know what happened.

I know it started as a story about tigers.

ALEX. I said there were no tigers.

CELIA. Oh do stop wrangling,

Both of you. It's your turn, Julia.

Do tell us that story you told the other day, about Lady Klootz and
the wedding cake.

PETER. And how the butler found her in the pantry, rinsing her mouth
out with champagne.

I like that story.

CELIA. I love that story.

ALEX. *I'm* never tired of hearing that story.

JULIA. Well, you all seem to know it.

CELIA. Do we all know it?

But we're never tired of hearing *you* tell it.

I don't believe everyone here knows it.

[*To the UNIDENTIFIED GUEST*] You don't know it, do you?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST.

No, I've never heard it.

CELIA. Here's one new listener for you, Julia;

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

And I don't believe that Edward knows it.

EDWARD. I may have heard it, but I don't remember it.

CELIA. And Julia's the only person to tell it.

She's such a good mimic.

JULIA. Am I a good mimic?

PETER. You *are* a good mimic. You never miss anything.

ALEX. She never misses anything unless she wants to.

CELIA. Especially the Lithuanian accent.

JULIA. Lithuanian? Lady Klootz?

PETER. I thought she was Belgian.

ALEX. Her father belonged to a Baltic family —

One of the *oldest* Baltic families

With a branch in Sweden and one in Denmark.

There were several very lovely daughters:

I wonder what's become of them now.

JULIA. Lady Klootz was very lovely, once upon a time.

What a life she led! I used to say to her: 'Greta!

You have too much vitality.' But she enjoyed herself.

[*To the UNIDENTIFIED GUEST*] Did *you* know Lady Klootz?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. No, I never met her.

CELIA. Go on with the story about the wedding cake.

JULIA. Well, but it really isn't my story.

I heard it first from Delia Verinder

Who was there when it happened.

[*To the UNIDENTIFIED GUEST*] Do *you* know Delia Verinder?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. No, I don't know her.

JULIA. Well, one can't be too careful

Before one tells a story.

ALEX. Delia Verinder?

Was she the one who had three brothers?

JULIA. How many brothers? Two, I think.

ALEX. No, there were three, but you wouldn't know the third one:

They kept him rather quiet.

JULIA. Oh, you mean *that* one.

ALEX. He was feeble-minded.

JULIA. Oh, not feeble-minded:

He was only harmless.

ALEX. Well then, harmless.

JULIA. He was very clever at repairing clocks;

And he had a remarkable sense of hearing —

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

The only man I ever met who could hear the cry of bats.

PETER. Hear the cry of bats?

JULIA. He could hear the cry of bats.

CELIA. But how do you know he could hear the cry of bats?

JULIA. Because he said so. And I believed him.

CELIA. But if he was so . . . harmless, how could you believe him?

He might have imagined it.

JULIA. My darling Celia,

You needn't be so sceptical. I stayed there once

At their castle in the North. How he suffered!

They had to find an island for him

Where there were no bats.

ALEX. And is he still there?

Julia is really a mine of information.

CELIA. There isn't much that Julia doesn't know.

PETER. Go on with the story about the wedding cake.

[EDWARD *leaves the room*]

JULIA. No, we'll wait until Edward comes back into the room.

Now I want to relax, Are there any more cocktails?

PETER. But do go on. Edward wasn't listening anyway.

JULIA. No, he wasn't listening, but he's such a strain —

Edward without Lavinia! He's quite impossible!

Leaving it to me to keep things going.

What a host! And nothing fit to eat!

The only reason for a cocktail party

For a gluttonous old woman like me

Is a really nice tit-bit. I can drink at home.

[EDWARD *returns with a tray*]

Edward, give me another of those delicious olives.

What's that? Potato crisps? No, I can't endure them.

Well, I started to tell you about Lady Klootz.

It was at the Vincewell wedding. Oh, so many years ago!

[*To the UNIDENTIFIED GUEST*] Did you know the Vincewells?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. No, I don't know the Vincewells

JULIA. Oh, they're both dead now. But I wanted to know.

If they'd been friends of yours, I couldn't tell the story.

PETER. Were they the parents of Tony Vincewell?

JULIA. Yes. Tony was the product, but not the solution.

He only made the situation more difficult.

You know Tony Vincewell? You knew him at Oxford?

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

PETER. No, I never knew him at Oxford:

I came across him last year in California.

JULIA. I've always wanted to go to California.

Do tell us what you were doing in California.

CELIA. Making a film.

PETER. Trying to make a film.

JULIA. Oh, what film was it? I wonder if I've seen it.

PETER. No, you wouldn't have seen it. As a matter of fact

It was never produced. They did a film

But they used a different scenario.

JULIA. Not the one you wrote?

PETER. Not the one I wrote:

But I had a very enjoyable time.

CELIA. Go on with the story about the wedding cake.

JULIA. Edward, do sit down for a moment.

I know you're always the perfect host,

But just try to pretend you're another guest

At Lavinia's party. There are so many questions

I want to ask you. It's a golden opportunity

Now Lavinia's away. I've always said:

'If I could only get Edward alone

And have a really *serious* conversation!'

I said so to Lavinia. She agreed with me.

She said: 'I wish you'd try.' And this is the first time

I've ever seen you without Lavinia

Except for the time she got locked in the lavatory

And couldn't get out. I know what you're thinking!

I know you think I'm a silly old woman

But I'm really very serious. Lavinia takes me seriously.

I believe that's the reason why she went away —

So that I could make you talk. Perhaps she's in the pantry

Listening to all we say!

EDWARD. No, she's not in the pantry.

CELIA. Will she be away for some time, Edward?

EDWARD. I really don't know until I hear from her.

If her aunt is very ill, she may be gone some time.

CELIA. And how will you manage while she is away?

EDWARD. I really don't know. I may go away myself.

CELIA. Go away yourself!

JULIA. Have you an aunt too?

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

EDWARD. No, I haven't any aunt. But I might go away.

CELIA. But, Edward . . . what was I going to say?

It's dreadful for old ladies alone in the country,
And almost impossible to get a nurse.

JULIA. Is that her Aunt Laura?

EDWARD. No; another aunt
Whom you wouldn't know. Her mother's sister
And rather a recluse.

JULIA. Her favourite aunt?

EDWARD. Her aunt's favourite niece. And she's rather difficult.
When she's ill, she insists on having Lavinia.

JULIA. I never heard of her being ill before.

EDWARD. No, she's always very strong. That's why when she's ill
She gets into a panic.

JULIA. And sends for Lavinia.

I quite understand. Are there any prospects?

EDWARD. No, I think she put it all into an annuity.

JULIA. So it's very unselfish of Lavinia
Yet very like her. But really, Edward,
Lavinia may be away for weeks,
Or she may come back and be called away again.
I understand these tough old women —
I'm one myself. I feel as if I knew
All about that aunt in Hampshire.

EDWARD. Hampshire?

JULIA. Didn't you say Hampshire?

EDWARD. No, I didn't say Hampshire.

JULIA. Did you say Hampstead?

EDWARD. No, I didn't say Hampstead.

JULIA. But she must live somewhere.

EDWARD. She lives in Essex.

JULIA. Anywhere near Colchester? Lavinia loves oysters.

EDWARD. No. In the *depths* of Essex.

JULIA. Well, we won't probe into it.

You have the address, and the telephone number?

I might run down and see Lavinia

On my way to Cornwall. But let's be sensible:

Now you must let me be *your* maiden aunt —

Living on an annuity, of course.

I am going to make you dine alone with me

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

On Friday, and talk to me about everything.

EDWARD. Everything?

JULIA. Oh, you know what I mean.

The next election. And the secrets of your cases.

EDWARD. Most of my secrets are quite uninteresting.

JULIA. Well, you shan't escape. You dine with me on Friday.

I've already chosen the people you're to meet.

EDWARD. But you asked me to dine with you alone.

JULIA. Yes, alone!

Without Lavinia! You'll like the other people —

But you're to talk to me. So that's all settled.

And now I must be going.

EDWARD. Must you be going?

PETER. But won't you tell the story about Lady Kloutz?

JULIA. What Lady Kloutz?

CELIA. And the wedding cake.

JULIA. Wedding cake? I wasn't at her wedding.

Edward, it's been a delightful evening:

The potato crisps were really excellent.

Now let me see. Have I got everything?

It's such a nice party, I hate to leave it.

It's such a nice party, I'd like to repeat it.

Why don't you *all* come to dinner on Friday?

No, I'm afraid my good Mrs. Batten

Would give me notice. And now I must be going.

ALEX. I'm afraid I ought to be going.

PETER. Celia —

May I walk along with you?

CELIA. No, I'm sorry, Peter;

I've got to take a taxi.

JULIA. You come with me, Peter:

You can get *me* a taxi, and then I can drop you.

I expect you on Friday, Edward. And Celia —

I must see you very soon. Now don't all go

Just because I'm going. Good-bye, Edward.

EDWARD. Good-bye, Julia.

[*Exeunt JULIA and PETER*]

CELIA. Good-bye, Edward.

Shall I see you soon?

EDWARD. Perhaps. I don't know.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

CELIA. Perhaps you don't know? Very well, good-bye.

EDWARD. Good-bye, Celia.

ALEX. Good-bye, Edward. I do hope
You'll have better news of Lavinia's aunt.

EDWARD. Oh . . . yes . . . thank you. Good-bye, Alex,
It was nice of you to come.

[*Exeunt ALEX and CELIA*]

[*To the UNIDENTIFIED GUEST*] Don't go yet.

Don't go yet. We'll finish the cocktails.

Or would you rather have whisky?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Gin.

EDWARD. Anything in it?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. A drop of water.

EDWARD. I want to apologise for this evening.

The fact is, I tried to put off this party:

These were only the people I couldn't put off

Because I couldn't get at them in time;

And I didn't know that *you* were coming.

I thought that Lavinia had told me the names

Of all the people she said she'd invited.

But it's only that dreadful old woman who mattered —

I shouldn't have minded anyone else,

[*The doorbell rings. EDWARD goes to the door, saying:*]

But she always turns up when she's least wanted.

[*Opens the door*]

Julia!

[*Enter JULIA*]

JULIA. Edward! How lucky that it's raining!

It made me remember my umbrella,

And there it is! Now what are you two plotting?

How very lucky it was my umbrella,

And not Alexander's — *he's* so inquisitive!

But *I* never poke into other people's business.

Well, good-bye again. I'm off at last.

[*Exit*]

EDWARD. I'm sorry. I'm afraid I don't know your name.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. I ought to be going.

EDWARD. Don't go yet.

I very much want to talk to somebody;

And it's easier to talk to a person you don't know.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

The fact is, that Lavinia has left me.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Your wife has left you?

EDWARD. Without warning, of course;

Just when she'd arranged a cocktail party.

She'd gone when I came in, this afternoon.

She left a note to say that she was leaving me;

But I don't know where she's gone.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. This is an occasion.

May I take another drink?

EDWARD. Whisky?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Gin.

EDWARD. Anything in it?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Nothing but water.

And I recommend you the same prescription . . .

Let me prepare it for you, if I may . . .

Strong . . . but sip it slowly . . . and drink it sitting down.

Breathe deeply, and adopt a relaxed position.

There we are. Now for a few questions.

How long married?

EDWARD. Five years.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Children?

EDWARD. No.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Then look at the brighter side.

You say you don't know where she's gone?

EDWARD. No, I do not.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Do you know who the man is?

EDWARD. There was no other man —

None that I know of.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Or another woman

Of whom she thought she had cause to be jealous?

EDWARD. She had nothing to complain of in my behaviour.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Then no doubt it's all for the best.

With another man, she might have made a mistake

And want to come back to you. If another woman,

She might decide to be forgiving

And gain an advantage. If there's no other woman

And no other man, then the reason may be deeper

And you've ground for hope that she won't come back at all.

If another man, then you'd want to re-marry

To prove to the world that somebody wanted you;

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

If another woman, you might have to marry her —
You might even imagine that you wanted to marry her.

EDWARD. But I want my wife back.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. That's the natural reaction.

It's embarrassing, and inconvenient.
It was inconvenient, having to lie about it
Because you can't tell the truth on the telephone.
It will all take time that you can't well spare;
But I put it to you . . .

EDWARD. Don't put it to me.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Then I suggest . . .

EDWARD. And please don't suggest.

I have often used these terms in examining witnesses,
So I don't like them. May I put it to *you*?
I know that I invited this conversation:
But I don't know who you are. This is not what I expected.
I only wanted to relieve my mind
By telling someone what I'd been concealing.
I don't think I want to know who you are;
But, at the same time, unless you know my wife
A good deal better than I thought, or unless you know
A good deal more about us than appears —
I think your speculations rather offensive.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. I know you as well as I know your wife;
And I knew that all you wanted was the luxury
Of an intimate disclosure to a stranger.
Let me, therefore, remain the stranger.
But let me tell you, that to approach the stranger
Is to invite the unexpected, release a new force,
Or let the genie out of the bottle.
It is to start a train of events
Beyond your control. So let me continue.
I will say then, you experience some relief
Of which you're not aware. It will come to you slowly:
When you wake in the morning, when you go to bed at night,
That you are beginning to enjoy your independence;
Finding your life becoming cosier and cosier
Without the consistent critic, the patient misunderstander
Arranging life a little better than you like it,
Preferring not quite the same friends as yourself,

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Or making your friends like her better than you;
And, turning the past over and over,
You'll wonder only that you endured it for so long.
And perhaps at times you will feel a little jealous
That she saw it first, and had the courage to break it —
Thus giving herself a permanent advantage.

EDWARD. It might turn out so, yet . . .

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Are you going to say, you love her?

EDWARD. Why, I thought we took each other for granted.

I never thought I should be any happier
With another person. Why speak of love?
We were used to each other. So her going away
At a moment's notice, without explanation,
Only a note to say that she had gone
And was not coming back — well, I can't understand it.
Nobody likes to be left with a mystery:
It's so . . . unfinished.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Yes, it's unfinished;
And nobody likes to be left with a mystery.
But there's more to it than that. There's a loss of personality;
Or rather, you've lost touch with the person
You thought you were. You no longer feel quite human.
You're suddenly reduced to the status of an object —
A living object, but no longer a person.
It's always happening, because one is an object
As well as a person. But we forget about it
As quickly as we can. When you've dressed for a party
And are going downstairs, with everything about you
Arranged to support you in the role you have chosen,
Then sometimes, when you come to the bottom step
There is one step more than your feet expected
And you come down with a jolt. Just for a moment
You have the experience of being an object
At the mercy of a malevolent staircase.
Or, take a surgical operation.
In consultation with the doctor and the surgeon,
In going to bed in the nursing home,
In talking to the matron, you are still the subject,
The centre of reality. But, stretched on the table,
You are a piece of furniture in a repair shop

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

For those who surround you, the masked actors;

All there is of you is your body

And the 'you' is withdrawn. May I replenish?

EDWARD. Oh, I'm sorry. What were you drinking?

Whisky?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Gin.

EDWARD. Anything with it?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Water.

EDWARD. To what does this lead?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. To finding out

What you really are. What you really feel.

What you really are among other people.

Most of the time we take ourselves for granted,

As we have to, and live on a little knowledge

About ourselves as we were. Who are you now?

You don't know any more than I do,

But rather less. You are nothing but a set

Of obsolete responses. The one thing to do

Is to do nothing. Wait.

EDWARD. Wait!

But waiting is the one thing impossible.

Besides, don't you see that it makes me ridiculous?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. It will do you no harm to find yourself
ridiculous.

Resign yourself to be the fool you are.

That's the best advice that I can give you.

EDWARD. But how can I wait, not knowing what I'm waiting for?

Shall I say to my friends, 'My wife has gone away'?

And they answer 'Where?' and I say 'I don't know';

And they say, 'But when will she be back?'

And I reply 'I don't know that she is coming back'.

And they ask 'But what are you going to do?'

And I answer 'Nothing'. They will think me mad

Or simply contemptible.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. All to the good.

You will find that you survive humiliation.

And that's an experience of incalculable value.

EDWARD. Stop! I agree that much of what you've said

Is true enough. But that is not all.

Since I saw her this morning when we had breakfast

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

I no longer remember what my wife is like.
I am not quite sure that I could describe her
If I had to ask the police to search for her.
I'm sure I don't know what she was wearing
When I saw her last. And yet I want her back.
And I *must* get her back, to find out what has happened
During the five years that we've been married.
I must find out who she is, to find out who I am.
And what is the use of all your analysis
If I am to remain always lost in the dark?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. There is certainly no purpose in remaining in the dark

Except long enough to clear from the mind
The illusion of having ever been in the light.
The fact that you can't give a reason for wanting her
Is the best reason for believing that you want her.

EDWARD. I want to see her again — here.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. You shall see her again — here.

EDWARD. Do you mean to say that you know where she is?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. That question is not worth the trouble of an answer.

But if I bring her back it must be on one condition:
That you promise to ask her no questions
Of where she has been.

EDWARD. I will not ask them.

And yet — it seems to me — when we began to talk
I was not sure I wanted her; and now I want her.
Do I want her? Or is it merely your suggestion?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. We do not know yet. In twenty-four hours
She will come to you here. You will be here to meet her.

[*The doorbell rings*]

EDWARD. I must answer the door.

[EDWARD *goes to the door*]

So it's you again, Julia!

[*Enter JULIA and PETER*]

JULIA. Edward, I'm so glad to find you.

Do you know, I must have left my glasses here,
And I simply can't see a thing without them.
I've been dragging Peter all over town
Looking for them everywhere I've been.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Has anybody found them? You can tell if they're mine —
Some kind of a plastic sort of frame —
I'm afraid I don't remember the colour,
But I'd know them, because one lens is missing.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST [*Sings*].

*As I was drinkin' gin and water,
And me bein' the One Eyed Riley,
Who came in but the landlord's daughter
And she took my heart entirely.*

You will keep our appointment?

EDWARD.

I shall keep it.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST [*Sings*].

*Tooryooly toory-iley,
What's the matter with One Eyed Riley?*

[*Exit*]

JULIA. Edward, who is that dreadful man?

I've never been so insulted in my life.

It's very lucky that I left my spectacles:

This is what I call an adventure!

Tell me about him. You've been *drinking* together!

So this is the kind of friend you have

When Lavinia is out of the way! Who is he?

EDWARD. *I don't know.*

JULIA. *You don't know?*

EDWARD. I never saw him before in my life.

JULIA. But how did he come here?

EDWARD. *I don't know.*

JULIA. *You don't know!* And what's his name?

Did I hear him say his name was Riley?

EDWARD. I don't know his name.

JULIA. *You don't know his name?*

EDWARD. I tell you I've no idea who he is

Or how he got here.

JULIA. *But what did you talk about*

Or were you singing songs all the time?

There's altogether too much mystery

About this place to-day.

EDWARD. *I'm very sorry.*

JULIA. No, I love it. But that reminds me

About my glasses. That's the greatest mystery.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Peter! Why aren't you looking for them?
Look on the mantelpiece. Where was I sitting?
Just turn out the bottom of that sofa —
No, this chair. Look under the cushion.

EDWARD. Are you quite sure they're not in your bag?

JULIA. Why no, of course not: that's where I keep them.

Oh, here they are! Thank you, Edward;
That really was very clever of you;
I'd never have found them but for you.
The next time I lose *anything*, Edward,
I'll come straight to you, instead of to St. Anthony.
And now I must fly. I've kept the taxi waiting.
Come along, Peter.

PETER. I hope you won't mind
If I don't come with you, Julia? On the way back
I remembered something I had to say to Edward . . .

JULIA. Oh, about Lavinia?

PETER. No, not about Lavinia.
It's something I want to consult him about,
And I could do it now.

JULIA. Of course I don't mind.

PETER. Well, at least you must let me take you down in the lift.

JULIA. No, you stop and talk to Edward. I'm not helpless yet.
And besides, I like to manage the machine myself —
In a lift I can meditate. Good-bye then.
And thank you — both of you — very much.

[Exit]

PETER. I hope I'm not disturbing you, Edward.

EDWARD. I seem to have been disturbed already;
And I did rather want to be alone.
But what's it all about?

PETER. I want your help.
I was going to telephone and try to see you later;
But this seemed an opportunity.

EDWARD. And what's your trouble?

PETER. This evening I felt I could bear it no longer.
That awful party! I'm sorry, Edward;
Of course it was really a very nice party
For everyone but me. And that wasn't your fault.
I don't suppose you noticed the situation.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

EDWARD. I did think I noticed one or two things;

But I don't pretend I was aware of everything.

PETER. Oh, I'm very glad that you didn't notice:

I must have behaved rather better than I thought.

If you didn't notice, I don't suppose the others did,

Though I'm rather afraid of Julia Shuttlethwaite.

EDWARD. Julia is certainly observant,

But I think she had some other matter on her mind.

PETER. It's about Celia. Myself and Celia.

EDWARD. Why, what could there be about yourself and Celia?

Have you anything in common, do you think?

PETER. It seemed to me we had a great deal in common.

We're both of us artists.

EDWARD. I never thought of that.

What arts do you practise?

PETER. You won't have seen my novel,

Though it had some very good reviews.

But it's more the cinema that interests both of us.

EDWARD. A common interest in the moving pictures

Frequently brings young people together.

PETER. Now you're only being sarcastic:

Celia was interested in the art of the film.

EDWARD. As a possible profession?

PETER. She might make it a profession;

Though she had her poetry.

EDWARD. Yes, I've seen her poetry —

Interesting if one is interested in Celia.

Apart, of course, from its literary merit:

Which I don't pretend to judge.

PETER. Well, I can judge it,

And I think it's very good. But that's not the point.

The point is, I thought we had a great deal in common

And I think she thought so too.

EDWARD. How did you come to know her?

[Enter ALEX]

ALEX. Ah, there you are, Edward! Do you know why I've looked in?

EDWARD. I'd like to know first how you got in, Alex.

ALEX. Why, I came and found that the door was open

And so I thought I'd slip in and see if anyone was with you.

PETER. Julia must have left it open.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

EDWARD. Never mind;

So long as you both shut it when you go out.

ALEX. Ah, but you're coming with me, Edward.

I thought, Edward may be all alone this evening,
And I know that he hates to spend an evening alone,
So you're going to come out and have dinner with me.

EDWARD. That's very thoughtful of you, Alex, I'm sure;

But I rather *want* to be alone, this evening.

ALEX. But you've got to have some dinner. Are you going out?

Is there anyone here to get dinner for you?

EDWARD. No, I shan't want much, and I'll get it myself.

ALEX. Ah, in that case I know what I'll do.

I'm going to give you a little surprise:

You know, I'm rather a famous cook.

I'm going straight to your kitchen now

And I shall prepare you a nice little dinner

Which you can have alone. And then we'll leave you.

Meanwhile, you and Peter can go on talking

And I shan't disturb you.

EDWARD. My dear Alex,
There'll be nothing in the larder worthy of your cooking.
I couldn't think of it.

ALEX. Ah, but that's my special gift —
Concocting a toothsome meal out of nothing.
Any scraps you have will do. I learned that in the East.
With a handful of rice and a little dried fish
I can make half a dozen dishes. Don't say a word.
I shall begin at once.

[Exit to kitchen]

EDWARD. Well, where did you leave off?

PETER. You asked me how I came to know Celia.

I met her here, about a year ago.

EDWARD. At one of Lavinia's amateur Thursdays?

PETER. A Thursday. Why do you say amateur?

EDWARD. Lavinia's attempts at starting a salon,
Where I entertained the minor guests
And dealt with the misfits, Lavinia's mistakes.
But you were one of the minor successes
For a time at least.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

PETER. I wouldn't say that.
But Lavinia was awfully kind to me
And I owe her a great deal. And then I met Celia.
She was different from any girl I'd ever known
And not easy to talk to, on that occasion.

EDWARD. Did you see her often?

ALEX'S VOICE. Edward, have you a double boiler?

EDWARD. I suppose there must be a double boiler:
Isn't there one in every kitchen?

ALEX'S VOICE. I can't find it.
There goes *that* surprise. I must think of another.

PETER. Not very often.
And when I did, I got no chance to talk to her.

EDWARD. You and Celia were asked for different purposes.
Your role was to be one of Lavinia's discoveries;
Celia's, to provide society and fashion.
Lavinia always had the ambition
To establish herself in two worlds at once —
But she herself had to be the link between them.
That is why, I think, her Thursdays were a failure.

PETER. You speak as if everything was finished.

EDWARD. Oh no, no, everything is left unfinished.
But you haven't told me how you came to know Celia.

PETER. I saw her again a few days later
Alone at a concert. And I was alone.
I've always gone to concerts alone —
At first, because I knew no one to go with,
And later, I found I preferred to go alone.
But a girl like Celia, it seemed very strange,
Because I thought of her merely as a name
In a society column, to find her there alone.
Anyway, we got into conversation
And I found that she went to concerts alone
And to look at pictures. So we often met
In the same way, and sometimes went together.
And to be with Celia, that was something different
From company or solitude. And we sometimes had tea
And once or twice dined together.

EDWARD. And after that
Did she ever introduce you to her family

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Or to any of her friends?

PETER. No, but once or twice she spoke of them
And about their lack of intellectual interests.

EDWARD. And what happened after that?

PETER. Oh, nothing happened.

But I thought that she really cared about me.

And I was so happy when we were together —

So . . . contented, so . . . at peace: I can't express it;

I had never imagined such quiet happiness.

I had only experienced excitement, delirium,

Desire for possession. It was not like that at all.

It was something very strange. There was such . . . tranquillity . . .

EDWARD. And what interrupted this interesting affair?

[Enter ALEX in shirtsleeves and an apron]

ALEX. Edward, I can't find any curry powder.

EDWARD. There isn't any curry powder. Lavinia hates curry.

ALEX. There goes another surprise, then. I must think.

I didn't expect to find any mangoes,

But I *did* count upon curry powder.

[Exit]

PETER. That is exactly what I want to know.

She has simply faded — into some other picture —

Like a film effect. She doesn't want to see me;

Makes excuses, not very plausible,

And when I do see her, she seems preoccupied

With some secret excitement which I cannot share.

EDWARD. Do you think she has simply lost interest in you?

PETER. You put it just wrong. I think of it differently.

It is not her interest in *me* that I miss —

But those moments in which we seemed to share some perception,

Some feeling, some indefinable experience

In which we were both unaware of ourselves.

In your terms, perhaps, she's lost interest in me.

EDWARD. That is all very normal. If you could only know

How lucky you are. In a little while

This might have become an ordinary affair

Like any other. As the fever cooled

You would have found that she was another woman

And that you were another man. I congratulate you

On a timely escape.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

PETER. I should prefer to be spared
Your congratulations. I had to talk to someone.
And I have been telling you of something real —
My first experience of reality
And perhaps it is the last. And you don't understand.

EDWARD. My dear Peter, I have only been telling you
What would have happened to you with Celia
In another six months' time. There it is.
You can take it or leave it.

PETER. But what am I to do?

EDWARD. Nothing. Wait. Go back to California.

PETER. But I must see Celia.

EDWARD. Will it be the same Celia?
Better be content with the Celia you remember.
Remember! I say it's already a memory.

PETER. But I must see Celia at least to make her tell me
What has happened, in her terms. Until I know that
I shan't know the truth about even the memory.
Did we really share these interests? Did we really feel the
same
When we heard certain music? Or looked at certain
pictures?

There was something real. But what is the reality . . .

[The telephone rings]

EDWARD. Excuse me a moment.

[Into telephone]

Hello! . . . I can't talk now . . .

Yes, there is . . . Well then, I'll ring you
As soon as I can.

[To PETER] I'm sorry. You were saying?

PETER. I was saying, what is the reality
Of experience between two unreal people?
If I can only hold to the memory
I can bear any future. But I must find out
The truth about the past, for the sake of the memory.

EDWARD. There's no memory you can wrap in camphor
But the moths will get in. So you want to see Celia.
I don't know why I should be taking all this trouble
To protect you from the fool you are.
What do you want me to do?

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

PETER. See Celia for me.

You know her in a different way from me
And you are so much older.

EDWARD. So much older?

PETER. Yes, I'm sure that she would listen to you
As someone disinterested.

EDWARD. Well, I will see Celia.

PETER. Thank you, Edward. It's very good of you.

[Enter ALEX, with his jacket on]

ALEX. Oh, Edward! I've prepared you such a treat!

I really think that of all my triumphs
This is the greatest. To make something out of
nothing!

Never, even when travelling in Albania,
Have I made such a supper out of so few materials
As I found in your refrigerator. But of course
I was lucky to find half-a-dozen eggs.

EDWARD. What! You used all those eggs! Lavinia's aunt
Has just sent them from the country.

ALEX. Ah, so the aunt
Really exists. A substantial proof.

EDWARD. No, no . . . I mean, this is another aunt.

ALEX. I understand. The real aunt. But you'll be grateful.

There are very few peasants in Montenegro
Who can have the dish that you'll be eating, nowadays.

EDWARD. But what about my breakfast?

ALEX. Don't worry about breakfast.

All you should want is a cup of black coffee
And a little dry toast. I've left it simmering.
Don't leave it longer than another ten minutes.
Now I'll be going, and I'll take Peter with me.

PETER. Edward, I've taken too much of your time,
And you want to be alone. Give my love to Lavinia
When she comes back . . . but, if you don't mind,
I'd rather you didn't tell *her* what I've told you.

EDWARD. I shall not say anything about it to Lavinia.

PETER. Thank you, Edward. Good night.

EDWARD. Good night, Peter,
And good night, Alex. Oh, and if you don't mind,
Please *shut the door after you*, so that it latches.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

ALEX. Remember, Edward, not more than ten minutes,
Twenty minutes, and my work will be ruined.

[*Exeunt ALEX and PETER*]

[EDWARD *picks up the telephone, and dials a number*]

EDWARD. Is Miss Celia Coplestone in? . . . How long ago? . . .
No, it doesn't matter.

CURTAIN

Act One. Scene 2

The same room: a quarter of an hour later. EDWARD is alone, playing Patience. The doorbell rings, and he goes to answer it.

CELIA'S VOICE. Are you alone?

[EDWARD returns with CELIA]

EDWARD. Celia! Why have you come back?

I said I would telephone as soon as I could:

And I tried to get you a short while ago.

CELIA. If there had happened to be anyone with you

I was going to say I'd come back for my umbrella. . . .

I must say you don't seem very pleased to see me.

Edward, I understand what has happened

But I could not understand your manner on the telephone.

It did not seem like you. So I felt I must see you.

Tell me it's all right, and then I'll go.

EDWARD. But how can you say you understand what has happened?

I don't know what has happened, or what is going to happen;

And to try to understand it, I want to be alone.

CELIA. I should have thought it was perfectly simple.

Lavinia has left you.

EDWARD. Yes, that *was* the situation.

I suppose it was pretty obvious to everyone.

CELIA. It was obvious that the aunt was a pure invention

On the spur of the moment, and not a very good one.

You should have been prepared with something better, for Julia;

But it doesn't really matter. They will know soon enough.

Doesn't that settle all our difficulties?

EDWARD. It has only brought to light the real difficulties.

CELIA. But surely, these are only temporary.

You know I accepted the situation

Because a divorce would ruin your career;

And we thought that Lavinia would never want to leave you.

Surely you don't hold to that silly convention

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

That the husband must always be the one to be divorced?
And if she chooses to give *you* the grounds . . .

EDWARD. I see. But it is not like that at all.

Lavinia is coming back.

CELIA. Lavinia coming back!

Do you mean to say that she's laid a trap for us?

EDWARD. No. If there is a trap, we are all in the trap,

We have set it for ourselves. But I do not know

What kind of a trap it is.

CELIA. Then what has happened?

[*The telephone rings*]

EDWARD. Damn the telephone. I suppose I must answer it.

Hello . . . oh, hello! . . . No. I mean yes, Alex;

Yes, of course . . . it was marvellous.

I've never tasted anything like it . . .

Yes, that's very interesting. But I just wondered

Whether it mightn't be rather indigestible? . . .

Oh, no, Alex, don't bring me any cheese;

I've got some cheese . . . No, not Norwegian;

But I don't really want cheese . . . Slipper what? . . .

Oh, from Yugoslavia . . . prunes and alcohol?

No, really, Alex, I don't want anything.

I'm very tired. Thanks awfully, Alex.

Good night.

CELIA. What on earth was that about?

EDWARD. That was Alex.

CELIA. I know it was Alex.

But what was he talking of?

EDWARD. I had quite forgotten.

He made his way in, a little while ago,

And insisted on cooking me something for supper;

And he said I must eat it within ten minutes.

I suppose it's still cooking.

CELIA. You suppose it's still cooking!

I thought I noticed a peculiar smell:

Of course it's still cooking — or doing *something*.

I must go and investigate.

[*Starts to leave the room*]

EDWARD. For heaven's sake, don't bother!

[*Exit CELIA*]

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Suppose someone came and found you in the kitchen?

[EDWARD goes over to the table and inspects his game of *Papience*. He moves a card. The doorbell rings repeatedly. Re-enter CELIA, in an apron.]

CELIA. You'd better answer the door, Edward.

It's the best thing to do. Don't lose your head.

You see, I really did leave my umbrella;

And I'll say I found you here starving and helpless

And had to do something. Anyway, I'm *staying*

And I'm not going to hide.

[Returns to kitchen. The bell rings again. EDWARD goes to front door, and is heard to say:]

Julia!

What have you come back for?

[Enter JULIA]

JULIA. I've had an inspiration!

[Enter CELIA with saucepan]

CELIA. Edward, it's ruined!

EDWARD. What a good thing.

CELIA. But it's ruined the saucepan too.

EDWARD. And half a dozen eggs:

I wanted one for breakfast. A boiled egg.

It's the only thing I know how to cook.

JULIA. Celia! I see you've had the same inspiration

That I had. Edward must be fed.

He's under such a strain. We must keep his strength up.

Edward! Don't you realise how lucky you are

To have *two* Good Samaritans? I never heard of that before.

EDWARD. The man who fell among thieves was luckier than I:

He was left at an inn.

JULIA. Edward, how ungrateful.

What's in that saucepan?

CELIA. Nobody knows.

EDWARD. It's something that Alex came and prepared for me.

He *would* do it. Three Good Samaritans.

I forgot all about it.

JULIA. But you mustn't touch it.

EDWARD. Of course I shan't touch it.

JULIA. My dear, I should have warned you:

Anything that Alex makes is absolutely deadly.

I could tell such tales of his poisoning people.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Now, my dear, you give me that apron
And we'll see what I can do. You stay and talk to Edward.

[Exit JULIA]

CELIA. But what has happened, Edward? What has happened?

EDWARD. Lavinia is coming back, I think.

CELIA. You think! Don't you know?

EDWARD. No, but I believe it. That man who was here —

CELIA. Yes, who was that man? I was rather afraid of him;
He has some sort of power.

EDWARD. I don't know who he is.

But I had some talk with him, when the rest of you had left,
And he said he would bring Lavinia back, tomorrow.

CELIA. But why should that man want to bring her back —
Unless he is the Devil! I could believe he was.

EDWARD. Because I asked him to.

CELIA. Because you asked him to!
Then he *must* be the Devil! He must have bewitched you.
How did he persuade you to want her back?

[A popping noise is heard from the kitchen]

EDWARD. What the devil's that?

[Re-enter JULIA, in apron, with a tray and three glasses]

JULIA. I've had an inspiration!
There's nothing in the place fit to eat:
I've looked high and low. But I found some champagne —
Only a half-bottle, to be sure,
And of course it isn't chilled. But it's so refreshing;
And I thought, we are all in need of a stimulant
After this disaster. Now I'll propose a health.
Can you guess whose health I'm going to propose?

EDWARD. No, I can't. But I won't drink to Alex's.

JULIA. Oh, it isn't Alex's. Come, I give you
Lavinia's aunt! You might have guessed it.

EDWARD and CELIA. Lavinia's aunt.

JULIA. Now, the next question
Is, what's to be done. That's very simple.
It's too late, or too early, to go to a restaurant.
You must both come home with me.

EDWARD. No, I'm sorry, Julia.
I'm too tired to go out, and I'm not at all hungry.
I shall have a few biscuits.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

JULIA. But you, Celia?
You must come and have a light supper with me —
Something very light.

CELIA. Thank you, Julia.
I think I will, if I may follow you
In about ten minutes? Before I go, there's something
I want to say to Edward.

JULIA. About Lavinia?
Well, come on quickly. And take a taxi.
You know, you're looking absolutely famished.
Good night, Edward.

[Exit JULIA]

CELIA. Well, how did he persuade you?

EDWARD. How did he persuade me? Did he persuade me?

I have a very clear impression
That he tried to persuade me it was all for the best
That Lavinia had gone; that I ought to be thankful.
And yet, the effect of all his argument
Was to make me see that I wanted her back.

CELIA. That's the Devil's method! So you want Lavinia back!

Lavinia! So the one thing you care about
Is to avoid a break — anything unpleasant!
No, it can't be that. I won't think it's that.
I think it is just a moment of surrender
To fatigue. And panic. You can't face the trouble.

EDWARD. No, it is not that. It is not only that.

CELIA. It cannot be simply a question of vanity:
That you think the world will laugh at you
Because your wife has left you for another man?
I shall soon put that right, Edward,
When you are free.

EDWARD. No, it is not that.
And all these reasons were suggested to me
By the man I call Riley — though his name is not Riley;
It was just a name in a song he sang . . .

CELIA. He sang you a song about a man named Riley!
Really, Edward, I think you are mad —
I mean, you're on the edge of a nervous breakdown.
Edward, if I go away now
Will you promise me to see a very great doctor

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Whom I have heard of — and his name is Reilly!

EDWARD. It would need someone greater than the greatest doctor
To cure *this* illness.

CELIA. Edward, if I go now,
Will you assure me that everything is right,
That you do not mean to have Lavinia back
And that you do mean to gain your freedom,
And that everything is all right between us?
That's all that matters. Truly, Edward,
If that is right, everything else will be,
I promise you.

EDWARD. No, Celia.
It has been very wonderful, and I'm very grateful,
And I think you are a very rare person.
But it was too late. And I should have known
That it wasn't fair to you.

CELIA. It wasn't fair to *me*!
You can stand there and talk about being fair to *me*!

EDWARD. But for Lavinia leaving, this would never have arisen.
What future had you ever thought there could be?

CELIA. What had I thought that the future could be?
I abandoned the future before we began,
And after that I lived in a present
Where time was meaningless, a private world of *ours*,
Where the word 'happiness' had a different meaning
Or so it seemed.

EDWARD. I have heard of that experience.

CELIA. A dream. I was happy in it till to-day,
And then, when Julia asked about Lavinia
And it came to me that Lavinia had left you
And that you would be free — then I suddenly discovered
That the dream was not enough; that I wanted something
more
And I waited, and wanted to run to tell you.
Perhaps the dream was better. It seemed the real reality,
And if this is reality, it is very like a dream.
Perhaps it was I who betrayed my own dream
All the while; and to find I wanted
This world as well as that . . . well, it's humiliating.

EDWARD. There is no reason why you should feel humiliated . . .

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

CELIA. Oh, don't think that you can humiliate me!

Humiliation — it's something I've done to myself.

I am not sure even that you seem real enough

To humiliate me. I suppose that most women

Would feel degraded to find that a man

With whom they thought they had shared something wonderful

Had taken them only as a passing diversion.

Oh, I dare say that you deceived yourself:

But that's what it was, no doubt.

EDWARD. I *didn't* take you as a passing diversion!

If you want to speak of passing diversions

How did you take Peter?

CELIA. Peter? Peter who?

EDWARD. Peter Quilpe, who was here this evening. *He* was in a dream

And now he is simply unhappy and bewildered.

CELIA. I simply don't know what you are talking about.

Edward, this is really too crude a subterfuge

To justify yourself. There was never anything

Between me and Peter.

EDWARD. Wasn't there? *He* thought so.

He came back this evening to talk to me about it.

CELIA. But this is ridiculous! I never gave Peter

Any reason to suppose I cared for him.

I thought he had talent; I saw that he was lonely;

I thought that I could help him. I took him to concerts.

But then, as he came to make more acquaintances,

I found him less interesting, and rather conceited.

But why should we talk about Peter? All that matters

Is, that you think you want Lavinia.

And if that is the sort of person you are —

Well, you had better have her.

EDWARD. It's not like that.

It is not that I am in love with Lavinia.

I don't think I was ever really in love with her.

If I have ever been in love — and I think that I have —

I have never been in love with anyone but you,

And perhaps I still am. But this can't go on.

It never could have been . . . a permanent thing:

You should have a man . . . nearer your own age.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

CELIA. I don't think I care for advice from you, Edward:

You are not entitled to take any interest
Now, in *my* future. I only hope you're competent
To manage your own. But if you are not in love
And never have been in love with Lavinia,
What is it that you want?

EDWARD. I am not sure.

The one thing of which I am relatively certain
Is, that only since this morning
I have met myself as a middle-aged man
Beginning to know what it is to feel old.
That is the worst moment, when you feel that you have lost
The desire for all that was most desirable,
Before you are contented with what you can desire;
Before you know what is left to be desired;
And you go on wishing that you could desire
What desire has left behind. But you cannot understand.
How could *you* understand what it is to feel old?

CELIA. But I want to understand you. I could understand.

And, Edward, please believe that whatever happens
I shall not loathe you. I shall only feel sorry for you.
It's only myself I am in danger of loathing.
But what will your life be? I cannot bear to think of it.
Oh, Edward! Can you be happy with Lavinia?

EDWARD. No — not happy: or, if there is any happiness,
Only the happiness of knowing
That the misery does not feed on the ruin of loveliness,
That the tedium is not the residue of ecstasy.
I see that my life was determined long ago
And that the struggle to escape from it
Is only a make-believe, a pretence
That what is, is not, or could be changed.
The self that can say 'I want this — or want that' —
The self that wills — he is a feeble creature;
He has to come to terms in the end
With the obstinate, the tougher self; who does not speak,
Who never talks, who cannot argue;
And who in some men may be the *guardian* —
But in men like me, the dull, the implacable,
The indomitable spirit of mediocrity.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

The willing self can contrive the disaster
Of this unwilling partnership — but can only flourish
In submission to the rule of the stronger partner.

CELIA. I am not sure, Edward, that I understand you ;
And yet I understand as I never did before.
I think — I believe — you are being yourself
As you never were before, with me.
Twice you have changed since I have been looking at you.
I looked at your face : and I thought that I knew
And loved every contour ; and as I looked
It withered, as if I had unwrapped a mummy.
I listened to your voice, that had always thrilled me,
And it became another voice — no, not a voice :
What I heard was only the noise of an insect,
Dry, endless, meaningless, inhuman —
You might have made it by scraping your legs together —
Or however grasshoppers do it. I looked,
And listened for your heart, your blood ;
And saw only a beetle the size of a man
With nothing more inside it than what comes out
When you tread on a beetle.

EDWARD. Perhaps that is what I am.
Tread on me, if you like.

CELIA. No, I won't tread on you.
That is not what you are. It is only what was left
Of what I had thought you were. I see another person,
I see you as a person whom I never saw before.
The man I saw before, he was only a projection —
I see that now — of something that I wanted —
No, not *wanted* — something I aspired to —
Something that I desperately wanted to exist.
It must happen somewhere — but what, and where is it?
Edward, I see that I was simply making use of you.
And I ask you to forgive me.

EDWARD. You . . . ask me to forgive you!

CELIA. Yes, for two things. First . . .

[The telephone rings]

EDWARD. Damn the telephone.

I suppose I had better answer it.

CELIA. Yes, better answer it.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

EDWARD. Hello! . . . Oh, Julia: what is it now?

Your spectacles again . . . where did you leave them?

Or have we . . . have I got to hunt all over?

Have you looked in your bag? . . . Well, don't snap my head off . . .

You're sure, in the kitchen? Beside the champagne bottle?

You're quite sure? . . . Very well, hold on if you like;

We . . . I'll look for them.

CELIA. Yes, you look for them.

I shall never go into your kitchen again.

[Exit EDWARD. *He returns with the spectacles and a bottle*]

EDWARD. She was right for once.

CELIA. She is always right.

But why bring an empty champagne bottle?

EDWARD. It isn't empty. It may be a little flat —

But why did she say that it was a half-bottle?

It's one of my best: and I have no half-bottles.

Well, I hoped that you would drink a final glass with me.

CELIA. What should we drink to?

EDWARD. Whom shall we drink to?

CELIA. To the Guardians.

EDWARD. To the Guardians?

CELIA. To the Guardians. It was you who spoke of guardians.

[*They drink*]

It may be that even Julia is a guardian.

Perhaps she is *my* guardian. Give me the spectacles.

Good night, Edward.

EDWARD. Good night . . . Celia.

[Exit CELIA]

Oh!

[*He snatches up the receiver*]

Hello, Julia! are you there? . . .

Well, I'm awfully sorry to have kept you waiting;

But we . . . I had to hunt for them . . . No, I found them.

. . . Yes, she's bringing them now . . . Good night.

CURTAIN

Act One. Scene 3

The same room: late afternoon of the next day. EDWARD alone. He goes to answer the doorbell.

EDWARD. Oh . . . good evening.

[*Enter the UNIDENTIFIED GUEST*]

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Good evening, Mr. Chamberlayne.

EDWARD. Well. May I offer you some gin and water?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. No, thank you. This is a different occasion.

EDWARD. I take it that as you have come alone

You have been unsuccessful.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Not at all.

I have come to remind you — you have made a decision.

EDWARD. Are you thinking that I may have changed my mind?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. No. You will not be ready to change your mind

Until you recover from having made a decision.

No. I have come to tell you that you will change your mind,

But that it will not matter. It will be too late.

EDWARD. I have half a mind to change my mind now

To show you that I am free to change it.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. You will change your mind, but you are not free.

Your moment of freedom was yesterday.

You made a decision. You set in motion

Forces in your life and in the lives of others

Which cannot be reversed. That is one consideration.

And another is this: it is a serious matter

To bring someone back from the dead.

EDWARD. From the dead?

That figure of speech is somewhat . . . dramatic,

As it was only yesterday that my wife left me.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Ah, but we die to each other daily.

What we know of other people

Is only our memory of the moments

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

During which we knew them. And they have changed since then.

To pretend that they and we are the same
Is a useful and convenient social convention
Which must sometimes be broken. We must also remember
That at every meeting we are meeting a stranger.

EDWARD. So you want me to greet my wife as a stranger?
That will not be easy.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. It is very difficult.
But it is perhaps still more difficult
To keep up the pretence that you are not strangers.
The affectionate ghosts: the grandmother,
The lively bachelor uncle at the Christmas party,
The beloved nursemaid — those who enfolded
Your childhood years in comfort, mirth, security —
If they returned, would it not be embarrassing?
What would you say to them, or they to you
After the first ten minutes? You would find it difficult
To treat them as strangers, but still more difficult
To pretend that you were not strange to each other.

EDWARD. You can hardly expect me to obliterate
The last five years.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. I ask you to forget nothing.
To try to forget is to try to conceal.

EDWARD. There are certainly things I should like to forget.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. And persons also. But you must not forget
them.

You must face them all, but meet them as strangers.

EDWARD. Then I myself must also be a stranger.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. And to yourself as well. But remember,
When you see your wife, you must ask no questions
And give no explanations. I have said the same to her.
Don't strangle each other with knotted memories.
Now I shall go.

EDWARD. Stop! Will you come back with her?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. No, I shall not come with her.

EDWARD. I don't know why,
But I think I should like you to bring her yourself.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Yes, I know you would. And for definite
reasons

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Which I am not prepared to explain to you
I must ask you not to speak of me to her;
And she will not mention me to you.

EDWARD. I promise.

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. And now you must await your visitors.

EDWARD. Visitors? What visitors?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. Whoever comes. The strangers.

As for myself, I shall take the precaution
Of leaving by the service staircase.

EDWARD. May I ask one question?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. You may ask it.

EDWARD. Who are you?

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST. I also am a stranger.

[Exit. A pause. EDWARD moves about restlessly. The bell rings, and he goes to the front door.]

EDWARD. Celia!

CELIA. Has Lavinia arrived?

EDWARD. Celia! Why have you come?

I expect Lavinia at any moment.

You must not be here. Why have you come here?

CELIA. Because Lavinia asked me.

EDWARD. Because Lavinia asked you!

CELIA. Well, not directly. Julia had a telegram

Asking her to come, and to bring me with her.

Julia was delayed, and sent me on ahead.

EDWARD. It seems very odd. And not like Lavinia.

I suppose there is nothing to do but wait.

Won't you sit down?

CELIA. Thank you.

[Pause]

EDWARD. Oh, my God, what shall we talk about?

We can't sit here in silence.

CELIA. Oh, I could.

Just looking at you. Edward, forgive my laughing.

You look like a little boy who's been sent for

To the headmaster's study; and is not quite sure

What he's been found out in. I never saw you so before.

This is really a ludicrous situation.

EDWARD. I'm afraid I can't see the humorous side of it.

CELIA. I'm not really laughing at you, Edward.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

I couldn't have laughed at anything, yesterday;

But I've learnt a lot in twenty-four hours.

It wasn't a very pleasant experience.

Oh, I'm glad I came!

I can see you at last as a human being.

Can't you see me that way too, and laugh about it?

EDWARD. I wish I could. I wish I understood anything.

I'm completely in the dark.

CELIA. But it's all so simple.

Can't you see that . . .

[*The doorbell rings*]

EDWARD. There's Lavinia.

[*Goes to front door*]

Peter!

[*Enter PETER*]

PETER. Where's Lavinia?

EDWARD. Don't tell me that Lavinia

Sent you a telegram . . .

PETER. No, not to me,

But to Alex. She told him to come here

And to bring me with him. He'll be here in a minute.

Celia! Have you heard from Lavinia too?

Or am I interrupting?

CELIA. I've just explained to Edward —

I only got here this moment myself —

That she telegraphed to Julia to come and bring me with her.

EDWARD. I wonder whom else Lavinia has invited.

PETER. Why, I got the impression that Lavinia intended

To have yesterday's cocktail party to-day.

So I don't suppose her aunt can have died.

EDWARD. What aunt?

PETER. The aunt you told us about.

But Edward — you remember our conversation yesterday?

EDWARD. Of course.

PETER. I hope you've done nothing about it.

EDWARD. No, I've done nothing.

PETER. I'm so glad.

Because I've changed my mind. I mean, I've decided

That it's all no use. I'm going to California.

CELIA. You're going to California!

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

PETER. Yes, I have a new job.

EDWARD. And how did that happen, overnight?

PETER. Why, it's a man Alex put me in touch with

And we settled everything this morning.

Alex is a wonderful person to know,

Because, you see, he knows everybody, everywhere.

So what I've really come for is to say good-bye.

CELIA. Well, Peter, I'm awfully glad, for your sake,

Though of course we . . . I shall miss you;

You know how I depended on you for concerts,

And picture exhibitions — more than you realised.

It *was* fun, wasn't it! But now you'll have a chance,

I hope, to realise your ambitions.

I shall miss you.

PETER. It's nice of you to say so;

But you'll find someone better, to go about with.

CELIA. I don't think that I shall be going to concerts.

I am going away too.

[LAVINIA *lets herself in with a latch-key*]

PETER. You're going abroad?

CELIA. I don't know. Perhaps.

EDWARD. You're both going away!

[*Enter LAVINIA*]

LAVINIA. Who's going away? Well, Celia. Well, Peter.

I didn't expect to find either of you here.

PETER *and* CELIA. But the telegram!

LAVINIA. What telegram?

CELIA. The one you sent to Julia.

PETER. And the one you sent to Alex.

LAVINIA. I don't know what you mean.

Edward, have you been sending telegrams?

EDWARD. Of course I haven't sent any telegrams.

LAVINIA. This is some of Julia's mischief.

And is *she* coming?

PETER. Yes, and Alex.

LAVINIA. Then I shall ask *them* for an explanation.

Meanwhile, I suppose we might as well sit down.

What shall we talk about?

EDWARD. Peter's going to America.

PETER. Yes, and I would have rung you up tomorrow

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

And come in to say good-bye before I left.

LAVINIA. And Celia's going too? Was that what I heard?
I congratulate you both. To Hollywood, of course?
How exciting for you, Celia! Now you'll have a chance
At last, to realise your ambitions.
You're going together?

PETER. We're not going together.
Celia told us she was going away,
But I don't know where.

LAVINIA. You don't know where?
And do you know where you are going, yourself?

PETER. Yes, of course, I'm going to California.

LAVINIA. Well, Celia, why don't you go to California?
Everyone says it's a wonderful climate:
The people who go there never want to leave it.

CELIA. Lavinia, I think I understand about Peter . . .

LAVINIA. I have no doubt you do.

CELIA. And why he is going . . .

LAVINIA. I don't doubt that either.

CELIA. And I believe he is right to go.

LAVINIA. Oh, so you advised him?

PETER. She knew nothing about it.

CELIA. But now that I may be going away — somewhere —
I should like to say good-bye — as friends.

LAVINIA. Why, Celia, but haven't we always been friends?
I thought you were one of my dearest friends —
At least, in so far as a girl *can* be a friend
Of a woman so much older than herself.

CELIA. Lavinia,
Don't put me off. I may not see you again.
What I want to say is this: I should like you to remember me
As someone who wants you and Edward to be happy.

LAVINIA. You are very kind, but very mysterious.
I'm sure that we shall manage somehow, thank you,
As we have in the past.

CELIA. Oh, not as in the past!
[*The doorbell rings, and EDWARD goes to answer it*]
Oh, I'm afraid that all this sounds rather silly!
But . . .

[EDWARD *re-enters with* JULIA]

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

JULIA. There you are, Lavinia! I'm sorry to be late.
But your telegram was a bit unexpected.
I dropped everything to come. And how is the dear aunt?

LAVINIA. So far as I know, she is very well, thank you.

JULIA. She must have made a marvellous recovery.

I said so to myself, when I got your telegram.

LAVINIA. But where, may I ask, was this telegram sent from?

JULIA. Why, from Essex, of course.

LAVINIA. And why from Essex?

JULIA. Because you've been in Essex.

LAVINIA. Because I've been in Essex!

JULIA. Lavinia! Don't say you've had a lapse of memory!

Then that accounts for the aunt — and the telegram.

LAVINIA. Well, perhaps I was in Essex. I really don't know.

JULIA. You don't know where you were? Lavinia!

Don't tell me you were abducted! Tell us

I'm thrilled . . .

[*The doorbell rings. EDWARD goes to answer it. Enter ALEX*]

ALEX. Has Lavinia arrived?

EDWARD. Yes.

ALEX. Welcome back, Lavinia!

When I got your telegram . . .

LAVINIA. Where from?

ALEX. Dedham.

LAVINIA. Dedham is in Essex. So it was from Dedham.

Edward, have *you* any friends in Dedham?

EDWARD. No, *I* have no connections in Dedham.

JULIA. Well, it's all delightfully mysterious.

ALEX. But what is the mystery?

JULIA. Alex, *don't* be inquisitive.

Lavinia has had a lapse of memory,

And so, of course, she sent us telegrams:

And now I don't believe she really wants us.

I can see that she is quite worn out

After her anxiety about her aunt —

Who, you'll be glad to hear, has quite recovered, Alex —

And after that long journey on the old Great Eastern,

Waiting at junctions. And I suppose she's famished.

ALEX. Ah, in that case I know what I'll do . . .

JULIA. No, Alex.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

We must leave them alone, and let Lavinia rest.
Now we'll all go back to *my* house. Peter, call a taxi.

[Exit PETER]

We'll have a cocktail party at *my* house to-day.

CELIA. Well, I'll go now. Good-bye, Lavinia.

Good-bye, Edward.

EDWARD. Good-bye, Celia.

CELIA. Good-bye, Lavinia.

LAVINIA. Good-bye, Celia.

[Exit CELIA]

JULIA. And now, Alex, you and I should be going.

EDWARD. Are you sure you haven't left anything, Julia?

JULIA. Left anything? Oh, you mean my spectacles.

No, they're here. Besides, they're no use to me.

I'm not coming back again *this* evening.

LAVINIA. Stop! I want you to explain the telegram.

JULIA. Explain the telegram? What do you think, Alex?

ALEX. No, Julia, *we* can't explain the telegram.

LAVINIA. I am sure that you could explain the telegram.

I don't know why. But it seems to me that yesterday

I started some machine, that goes on working,

And I cannot stop it; no, it's not like a machine —

Or if it's a machine, someone else is running it.

But who? Somebody is always interfering . . .

I don't feel free . . . and yet I started it . . .

JULIA. Alex, do you think we could explain *anything*?

ALEX. I think not, Julia. She must find out for herself:

That's the only way.

JULIA. How right you are!

Well, my dears, I shall see you very soon.

EDWARD. *When* shall we see you?

JULIA. Did I say you'd see me?

Good-bye. I believe . . . I haven't left anything.

[Enter PETER]

PETER. I've got a taxi, Julia.

JULIA. Splendid! Good-bye!

[Exeunt JULIA, ALEX and PETER]

LAVINIA. I must say, you don't seem very pleased to see me.

EDWARD. I can't say that I've had much opportunity

To seem anything. But of course I'm glad to see you.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

LAVINIA. Yes, that was a silly thing to say.

Like a schoolgirl. Like Celia. I don't know why I said it.

Well, here I am.

EDWARD. I am to ask no questions.

LAVINIA. And I know I am to give no explanations.

EDWARD. And I am to give no explanations.

LAVINIA. And I am to ask no questions. And yet . . . why not?

EDWARD. I don't know why not. So what are we to talk about?

LAVINIA. There is one thing I ought to know, because of other people

And what to do about them. It's about that party.

I suppose you won't believe I forgot all about it!

I let you down badly. What did you do about it?

I only remembered after I had left.

EDWARD. I telephoned to everyone I knew was coming

But I couldn't get everyone. And so a few came.

LAVINIA. Who came?

EDWARD. Just those who were here this evening . . .

LAVINIA. That's odd.

EDWARD. . . . and one other. I don't know who he was,

But *you* ought to know.

LAVINIA. Yes, I think I know.

But I'm puzzled by Julia. That woman is the devil.

She knows by instinct when something's going to happen.

Trust her not to miss any awkward situation!

And what did you tell them?

EDWARD. I invented an aunt

Who was ill in the country, and had sent for you.

LAVINIA. Really, Edward! You had better have told the truth:

Nothing less than the truth could deceive Julia.

But how did the aunt come to live in Essex?

EDWARD. Julia compelled me to make her live somewhere.

LAVINIA. I see. So Julia made her live in Essex;

And made the telegrams come from Essex.

Well, I shall have to tell Julia the truth.

I shall always tell the truth now.

We have wasted such a lot of time in lying.

EDWARD. I don't quite know what you mean.

LAVINIA. Oh, Edward!

The point is, that since I've been away

I see that I've taken you much too seriously.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

And now I can see how absurd you are.

EDWARD. That is a very serious conclusion

To have arrived at in . . . how many? . . . thirty-two hours.

LAVINIA. Yes, a very important discovery,

Finding that you've spent five years of your life

With a man who has no sense of humour;

And that the effect upon me was

That I lost all sense of humour myself.

That's what came of always giving in to you.

EDWARD. I was unaware that you'd always given in to me.

It struck me very differently. As we're on the subject,

I thought that it was I who had given in to *you*.

LAVINIA. I know what you mean by giving in to *me*:

You mean, leaving all the practical decisions

That you should have made yourself. I remember —

Oh, I ought to have realised what was coming —

When we were planning our honeymoon,

I couldn't make you say where you wanted to go . . .

EDWARD. But I wanted *you* to make that decision.

LAVINIA. But how could I tell where I wanted to go

Unless you suggested some other place first?

And I remember that finally in desperation

I said: 'I suppose you'd as soon go to Peacehaven' —

And you said 'I don't mind'.

EDWARD. Of course I didn't mind.

I meant it as a compliment.

LAVINIA. You meant it as a compliment!

And you were so considerate, people said;

And you thought you were unselfish. It was only passivity;

You only wanted to be bolstered, encouraged. . . .

EDWARD. Encouraged? To what?

LAVINIA. To think well of yourself.

You know it was I who made you work at the Bar . . .

EDWARD. You nagged me because I didn't get enough work

And said that I ought to meet more people:

But when the briefs began to come in —

And they didn't come through any of *your* friends —

You suddenly found it inconvenient

That I should be always too busy or too tired

To be of use to you socially . . .

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

LAVINIA. I *never* complained.

EDWARD. No; and it was perfectly infuriating,
The way you *didn't* complain . . .

LAVINIA. It was you who complained
Of seeing nobody but solicitors and clients . . .

EDWARD. And you were never very sympathetic.

LAVINIA. Well, but I tried to do something about it.
That was why I took so much trouble
To have those Thursdays, to give you the chance
Of talking to intellectual people . . .

EDWARD. You would have given me about as much opportunity
If you had hired me as your butler:
Some of your guests may have thought I *was* the butler.

LAVINIA. And on several occasions, when somebody was coming
Whom I particularly wanted you to meet,
You didn't arrive until just as they were leaving.

EDWARD. Well, at least, *they* can't have thought I was the butler.

LAVINIA. Everything I tried only made matters worse,
And the moment you were offered something that you wanted
You wanted something else. I shall treat you very differently
In future.

EDWARD. Thank you for the warning. But tell me,
Since this is how you see me, why did you come back?

LAVINIA. Frankly, I don't know. I was warned of the danger,
Yet something, or somebody, compelled me to come.
And why did you want me?

EDWARD. I don't know either.
You say you were trying to 'encourage' me:
Then why did you always make me feel insignificant?
I may not have known what life I wanted,
But it wasn't the life you chose for me.
You wanted your husband to be *successful*,
You wanted me to supply a public background
For your kind of public life. You wished to be a hostess
For whom my career would be a support.
Well, I tried to be accommodating. But, in future,
I shall behave, I assure you, very differently.

LAVINIA. Bravo! Edward. This is surprising.
Now who could have taught you to answer back like that?

EDWARD. I have had quite enough humiliation

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Lately, to bring me to the point
At which humiliation ceases to humiliate.
You get to the point at which you cease to feel
And then you speak your mind.

LAVINIA. That will be a novelty
To find that you have a mind to speak.
Anyway, I'm prepared to take you as you are.

EDWARD. You mean, you are prepared to take me
As I was, or as you think I am.
But what do you think I am?

LAVINIA. Oh, what you always were.
As for me, I'm rather a different person
Whom you must get to know.

EDWARD. This is very interesting :
But you seem to assume that you've done all the changing —
Though I haven't yet found it a change for the better.
But doesn't it occur to you that possibly
I may have changed too?

LAVINIA. Oh, Edward, when you were a little boy,
I'm sure you were always getting yourself measured
To prove how you had grown since the last holidays.
You were always intensely concerned with yourself;
And if other people grow, well, you want to grow too.
In what way have you changed?

EDWARD. The change that comes
From seeing oneself through the eyes of other people.

LAVINIA. That must have been very shattering for you.
But never mind, you'll soon get over it
And find yourself another little part to play,
With another face, to take people in.

EDWARD. One of the most infuriating things about you
Has always been your perfect assurance
That you understood me better than I understood myself.

LAVINIA. And the most infuriating thing about you
Has always been your placid assumption
That I wasn't worth the trouble of understanding.

EDWARD. So here we are again. Back in the trap,
With only one difference, perhaps — we can fight each
other,
Instead of each taking his corner of the cage.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Well, it's a better way of passing the evening
Than listening to the gramophone.

LAVINIA. We have very good records;
But I always suspected that you really hated music
And that the gramophone was only your escape
From talking to me when we had to be alone.

EDWARD. I've often wondered why you married me.

LAVINIA. Well, you really were rather attractive, you know;
And you kept on *saying* that you were in love with me —
I believe you were trying to persuade yourself you were.
I seemed always on the verge of some wonderful experience
And then it never happened. I wonder now
How you could have thought you were in love with me.

EDWARD. Everybody told me that I was;
And they told me how well suited we were.

LAVINIA. It's a pity that you had no opinion of your own.
Oh, Edward, I should like to be good to you —
Or if that's impossible, at least be horrid to you —
Anything but nothing, which is all you seem to want of me.
But I'm sorry for you . . .

EDWARD. Don't say you are sorry for me!
I have had enough of people being sorry for me.

LAVINIA. Yes, because they can never be so sorry for you
As you are for yourself. And that's hard to bear.
I thought that there might be some way out for you
If I went away. I thought that if I died
To you, I who had been only a ghost to you,
You might be able to find the road back
To a time when you were real — for you must have been real
At some time or other, before you ever knew me:
Perhaps only when you were a child.

EDWARD. I don't want you to make yourself responsible for me:
It's only another kind of contempt.
And I do not want you to explain me to myself.
You're still trying to invent a personality for me
Which will only keep me away from myself.

LAVINIA. You're complicating what is in fact very simple.
But there is one point which I see clearly:
We are not to relapse into the kind of life we led
Until yesterday morning.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

EDWARD. There was a door
And I could not open it. I could not touch the handle.
Why could I not walk out of my prison?
What is hell? Hell is oneself,
Hell is alone, the other figures in it
Merely projections. There is nothing to escape from
And nothing to escape to. One is always alone.

LAVINIA. Edward, what *are* you talking about?
Talking to yourself. Could you bear, for a moment,
To think about *me*?

EDWARD. It was only yesterday
That damnation took place. And now I must live with it
Day by day, hour by hour, for ever and ever.

LAVINIA. I think you're on the edge of a nervous breakdown!

EDWARD. Don't say that!

LAVINIA. I must say it.

I know . . . of a doctor who I think could help you.

EDWARD. If I go to a doctor, I shall make my own choice;
Not take one whom you choose. How do I know
That you wouldn't see him first, and tell him all about me
From *your* point of view? But I don't need a doctor.
I am simply in hell. Where there are no doctors —
At least, not in a professional capacity.

LAVINIA. One can be practical, even in hell:

And you know I am much more practical than you are.

EDWARD. I ought to know by now what you consider practical.
Practical! I remember, on our honeymoon,
You were always wrapping things up in tissue paper
And then had to unwrap everything again
To find what you wanted. And I never could teach you
How to put the cap on a tube of tooth-paste.

LAVINIA. Very well, then, I shall not try to press you.

You're much too divided to know what you want.

But, being divided, you will tend to compromise,

And your sort of compromise will be the old one.

EDWARD. You don't understand me. Have I not made it clear
That in future you will find me a different person?

LAVINIA. Indeed. And has the difference nothing to do
With Celia going to California?

EDWARD. Celia? Going to California?

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

LAVINIA.

Yes, with Peter.

Really, Edward, if you were human
You would burst out laughing. But you won't.

EDWARD. O God, O God, if I could return to yesterday
Before I thought that I had made a decision.
What devil left the door on the latch
For these doubts to enter? And then you came back, you
The angel of destruction — just as I felt sure.
In a moment, at your touch, there is nothing but ruin.
O God, what have I done? The python. The octopus.
Must I become after all what you would make me?

LAVINIA. Well, Edward, as I am unable to make you laugh,
And as I can't persuade you to see a doctor,
There's nothing else at present that I can do about it.
I ought to go and have a look in the kitchen.
I know there are some eggs. But we must go out for dinner.
Meanwhile, my luggage is in the hall downstairs:
Will you get the porter to fetch it up for me?

CURTAIN

Act Two

SIR HENRY HARCOURT-REILLY's *consulting room in London. Morning: several weeks later.* SIR HENRY *alone at his desk. He presses an electric button. The NURSE-SECRETARY enters, with Appointment Book.*

REILLY. About those three appointments this morning, Miss Barraway:

I should like to run over my instructions again.
You understand, of course, that it is important
To avoid any meeting?

NURSE-SECRETARY. You made that clear, Sir Henry:
The first appointment at eleven o'clock.
He is to be shown into the small waiting-room;
And you will see him almost at once.

REILLY. I shall see him at once. And the second?

NURSE-SECRETARY. The second to be shown into the other room
Just as usual. She arrives at a quarter past;
But you may keep her waiting.

REILLY. Or she may keep me waiting;
But I think she will be punctual.

NURSE-SECRETARY. I telephone through
The moment she arrives. I leave her there
Until you ring three times.

REILLY. And the third patient?

NURSE-SECRETARY. The third one to be shown into the small room;
And I need not let you know that she has arrived.
Then, when you ring, I show the others out;
And only after they have left the house. . . .

REILLY. Quite right, Miss Barraway. That's all for the moment.

NURSE-SECRETARY. Mr. Gibbs is here, Sir Henry.

REILLY. Ask him to come straight in.
[Exit NURSE-SECRETARY]

[ALEX enters almost immediately]

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

ALEX. When is Chamberlayne's appointment?

REILLY. At eleven o'clock,

The conventional hour. We have not much time.

Tell me now, did you have any difficulty

In convincing him I was the man for his case?

ALEX. Difficulty? No! He was only impatient

At having to wait four days for the appointment.

REILLY. It was necessary to delay his appointment

To lower his resistance. But what I mean is,

Does he trust your judgement?

ALEX. Yes, implicitly.

It's not that he regards me as very intelligent,

But he thinks I'm well informed: the sort of person

Who would know the right doctor, as well as the right shops.

Besides, he was ready to consult any doctor

Recommended by anyone except his wife.

REILLY. I had already impressed upon her

That she was not to mention my name to him.

ALEX. With your usual foresight. Now, he's quite triumphant

Because he thinks he's stolen a march on her.

And when you've sent him to a sanatorium

Where she can't get at him — then, he believes,

She will be very penitent. He's enjoying his illness.

REILLY. Illness offers him a double advantage:

To escape from himself — and get the better of his wife.

ALEX. Not to escape from her?

REILLY. He doesn't want to escape from her.

ALEX. He is staying at his club.

REILLY. Yes, that is where he wrote from.

[*The house-telephone rings*]

Hello! Yes, show him up.

ALEX. You will have a busy morning!

I will go out by the service staircase

And come back when they've gone.

REILLY. Yes, when they've gone.

[*Exit ALEX by side door*]

[*EDWARD is shown in by NURSE-SECRETARY*]

EDWARD. Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly —

[*Stops and stares at REILLY*]

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

REILLY [*without looking up from his papers*]. Good morning, Mr. Chamberlayne.

Please sit down. I won't keep you a moment.

— Now, Mr. Chamberlayne?

EDWARD. It came into my mind
Before I entered the door, that you might be the same person:
But I dismissed that as just another symptom.
Well, I should have known better than to come here
On the recommendation of a man who did not know you.
Yet Alex is so plausible. And his recommendations
Of shops, have always been satisfactory.
I beg your pardon. But he *is* a blunderer.
I should like to know . . . but what is the use!
I suppose I might as well go away at once.

REILLY. No. If you please, sit down, Mr. Chamberlayne.
You are not going away, so you might as well sit down.
You were going to ask a question.

EDWARD. When you came to my flat
Had you been invited by my wife as a guest
As I supposed? . . . Or did she *send* you?

REILLY. I cannot say that I had been invited;
And Mrs. Chamberlayne did not know that I was coming.
But I knew you would be there, and whom I should find with you.

EDWARD. But you had seen my wife?

REILLY. Oh yes, I had seen her.

EDWARD. So this is a trap!

REILLY. Let's not call it a trap.
But if it is a trap, then you cannot escape from it:
And so . . . you might as well sit down.
I think that you will find that chair comfortable.

EDWARD. You knew,
Before I began to tell you, what had happened?

REILLY. That is so, that is so. But all in good time.

Let us dismiss that question for the moment.

Tell me first, about the difficulties

On which you want my professional opinion.

EDWARD. It's not for me to blame you for bringing my wife back,
I suppose. You seemed to be trying to persuade me
That I was better off without her. But didn't you realise
That I was in no state to make a decision?

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

REILLY. If I had not brought your wife back, Mr. Chamberlayne,
Do you suppose that things would be any better — now?

EDWARD. I don't know, I'm sure. They could hardly be worse.

REILLY. They might be much worse. You might have ruined three lives
By your indecision. Now there are only two —
Which you still have the chance of redeeming from ruin.

EDWARD. You talk as if I was capable of action:

If I were, I should not need to consult you

Or anyone else. I came here as a patient.

If you take no interest in my case, I can go elsewhere.

REILLY. You have reason to believe that you are very ill?

EDWARD. I should have thought a doctor could see that for himself.

Or at least that he would enquire about the symptoms.

Two people advised me recently,

Almost in the same words, that I ought to see a doctor.

They said — again, in almost the same words —

That I was on the edge of a nervous breakdown.

I didn't know it then myself — but if they saw it

I should have thought that a doctor could see it.

REILLY. 'Nervous breakdown' is a term I never use:

It can mean almost anything.

EDWARD. And since then, I have realised
That mine is a very unusual case.

REILLY. All cases are unique, and very similar to others.

EDWARD. Is there a sanatorium to which you send such patients
As myself, under your personal observation?

REILLY. You are very impetuous, Mr. Chamberlayne.

There are several kinds of sanatoria

For several kinds of patient. And there are also patients

For whom a sanatorium is the worst place possible.

We must first find out what is wrong with you

Before we decide what to do with you.

EDWARD. I doubt if you have ever had a case like mine:

I have ceased to believe in my own personality.

REILLY. Oh, dear yes; this is serious. A very common malady.
Very prevalent indeed.

EDWARD. I remember, in my childhood . . .

REILLY. I always begin from the immediate situation

And then go back as far as I find necessary.

You see, your memories of childhood —

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

I mean, in your present state of mind —
Would be largely fictitious; and as for your dreams,
You would produce amazing dreams, to oblige me.
I could make you dream any kind of dream I suggested,
And it would only go to flatter your vanity
With the temporary stimulus of feeling interesting.

EDWARD. But I am obsessed by the thought of my own insignificance.

REILLY. Precisely. And I could make you feel important,
And you would imagine it a marvellous cure;
And you would go on, doing such amount of mischief
As lay within your power — until you came to grief.
Half of the harm that is done in this world
Is due to people who want to feel important.
They don't mean to do harm — but the harm does not interest
them.

Or they do not see it, or they justify it
Because they are absorbed in the endless struggle
To think well of themselves.

EDWARD. If I am like that

I must have done a great deal of harm.

REILLY. Oh, not so much as you would like to think:

Only, shall we say, within your modest capacity.
Try to explain what has happened since I left you.

EDWARD. I see now why I wanted my wife to come back.

It was because of what she had made me into.
We had not been alone again for fifteen minutes
Before I felt, and still more acutely —
Indeed, acutely, perhaps, for the first time,
The whole oppression, the unreality
Of the role she had always imposed upon me
With the obstinate, unconscious, sub-human strength
That some women have. Without her, it was vacancy.
When I thought she had left me, I began to dissolve,
To cease to exist. That was what she had done to me!
I cannot live with her — that is now intolerable;
I cannot live without her, for she has made me incapable
Of having any existence of my own.
That is what she has done to me in five years together!
She has made the world a place I cannot live in
Except on her terms. I must be alone,

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

But not in the same world. So I want you to put me
Into your sanatorium. I could be alone there? -

[House-telephone rings]

REILLY [*into telephone*]. Yes.

[*To EDWARD*] Yes, you could be alone there.

EDWARD.

I wonder

If you have understood a word of what I have been saying.

REILLY. You must have patience with me, Mr. Chamberlayne:

I learn a good deal by merely observing you,

And letting you talk as long as you please,

And taking note of what you do not say.

EDWARD. I once experienced the extreme of physical pain,

And now I know there is suffering worse than that.

It is surprising, if one had time to be surprised:

I am not afraid of the death of the body,

But this death is terrifying. The death of the spirit —

Can you understand what I suffer?

REILLY.

I understand what you mean.

EDWARD. I can no longer act for myself.

Coming to see you — that's the last decision

I was capable of making. I am in your hands.

I cannot take any further responsibility.

REILLY. Many patients come in that belief.

EDWARD. And now will you send me to the sanatorium?

REILLY. You have nothing else to tell me?

EDWARD.

What else can I tell you?

You didn't want to hear about my early history.

REILLY. No, I did not want to hear about your *early* history.

EDWARD. And so will you send me to the sanatorium?

I can't go home again. And at my club

They won't let you keep a room for more than seven days;

I haven't the courage to go to a hotel,

And besides, I need more shirts — you can get my wife

To have my things sent on: whatever I shall need.

But of course you mustn't tell her where I am.

Is it far to go?

REILLY. You might say, a long journey.

But before I treat a patient like yourself

I need to know a great deal more about him,

Than the patient himself can always tell me.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Indeed, it is often the case that my patients
Are only pieces of a total situation
Which I have to explore. The single patient
Who is ill by himself, is rather the exception.
I have recently had another patient
Whose situation is much the same as your own.

[Presses the bell on his desk three times]

You must accept a rather unusual procedure:
I propose to introduce you to the other patient.

EDWARD. What do you mean? Who is this other patient?

I consider this very unprofessional conduct —

I will not discuss my case before another patient.

REILLY. On the contrary. That is the only way

In which it can be discussed. You have told me nothing.

You have had the opportunity, and you have said enough

To convince me that you have been making up your case

So to speak, as you went along. A barrister

Ought to know his brief before he enters the court.

EDWARD. I am at least free to leave. And I propose to do so.

My mind is made up. I shall go to a hotel.

REILLY. It is just because you are not free, Mr. Chamberlayne,

That you have come to me. It is for me to give you that —

Your freedom. That is my affair.

[LAVINIA is shown in by the NURSE-SECRETARY]

But here is the other patient.

EDWARD. Lavinia!

LAVINIA. Well, Sir Henry!

I said I would come to talk about my husband:

I didn't say I was prepared to meet him.

EDWARD. And I did not expect to meet *you*, Lavinia.

I call this a very dishonourable trick.

REILLY. Honesty before honour, Mr. Chamberlayne.

Sit down, please, both of you. Mrs. Chamberlayne,

Your husband wishes to enter a sanatorium,

And that is a question which naturally concerns
you.

EDWARD. I am not going to any sanatorium.

I am going to a hotel. And I shall ask you, Lavinia,

To be so good as to send me on some clothes.

LAVINIA. Oh, to what hotel?

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

EDWARD. I don't know — I mean to say,
That doesn't concern you.

LAVINIA. In that case, Edward,
I don't think your clothes concern me either.
[To REILLY] I presume you will send him to the same sanatorium
To which you sent me? Well, he needs it more than I did.

REILLY. I am glad that you have come to see it in that light —
At least, for the moment. But, Mrs. Chamberlayne,
You have never visited my sanatorium.

LAVINIA. What do you mean? I asked to be sent
And you took me there. If that was not a sanatorium
What was it?

REILLY. A kind of hotel. A retreat
For people who imagine that they need a respite
From everyday life. They return refreshed;
And if they believe it to be a sanatorium
That is good reason for not sending them to one.
The people who need my sort of sanatorium
Are not easily deceived.

LAVINIA. Are you a devil
Or merely a lunatic practical joker?

EDWARD. I incline to the second explanation
Without the qualification 'lunatic'.
Why should *you* go to a sanatorium?
I have never known anyone in my life
With fewer mental complications than you;
You're stronger than a . . . battleship. That's what drove me mad.
I am the one who needs a sanatorium —
But I'm not going there.

REILLY. You are right, Mr. Chamberlayne.
You are no case for my sanatorium:
You are much too ill.

EDWARD. Much too ill?
Then I'll go and be ill in a suburban boarding-house.

LAVINIA. That would never suit you, Edward. Now I know of a hotel
In the New Forest . . .

EDWARD. How like you, Lavinia.
You always know of something better.

LAVINIA. It's only that I have a more practical mind
Than you have, Edward. You do know that.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

EDWARD. Only because you've told me so often.

I'd like to see *you* filling up an income-tax form.

LAVINIA. Don't be silly, Edward. When I say practical,

I mean practical in the things that really matter.

REILLY. May I interrupt this interesting discussion?

I say you are both too ill. There are several symptoms

Which must occur together, and to a marked degree,

To qualify a patient for *my* sanatorium:

And one of them is an honest mind.

That is one of the causes of their suffering.

LAVINIA. No one can say my husband has an honest mind.

EDWARD. And I could not honestly say that of *you*, Lavinia.

REILLY. I congratulate you both on your perspicacity.

Your sympathetic understanding of each other

Will prepare you to appreciate what I have to say to you.

I do not trouble myself with the common cheat,

Or with the insuperably, innocently dull:

My patients such as you are the self-deceivers

Taking infinite pains, exhausting their energy,

Yet never quite successful. You have both of you pretended

To be consulting me; both, tried to impose upon me

Your own diagnosis, and prescribe your own cure.

But when you put yourselves into hands like mine

You surrender a great deal more than you meant to.

This is the consequence of trying to lie to me.

LAVINIA. I did not come here to be insulted.

REILLY. You have come where the word 'insult' has no meaning;

And you must put up with that. All that you have told me —

Both of you — was true enough: you described your feelings —

Or some of them — omitting the important facts.

Let me take your husband first.

[*To* EDWARD]

You were lying to me

By concealing your relations with Miss Coplestone.

EDWARD. This is monstrous! My wife knew nothing about it.

LAVINIA. Really, Edward! Even if I'd been blind

There were plenty of people to let me know about it.

I wonder if there was anyone who didn't know.

REILLY. There was one, in fact. But you, Mrs. Chamberlayne,

Tried to make me believe that it was this discovery

Precipitated what you called your nervous breakdown.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

LAVINIA. But it's true! I was completely prostrated;
Even if I have made a partial recovery.

REILLY. Certainly, you were completely prostrated,
And certainly, you have somewhat recovered.
But you failed to mention that the cause of your distress
Was the defection of your lover — who suddenly
For the first time in his life, fell in love with someone,
And with someone of whom you had reason to be jealous.

EDWARD. Really, Lavinia! This is very interesting.
You seem to have been much more successful at concealment
Than I was. Now I wonder who it could have been.

LAVINIA. Well, tell him if you like.

REILLY. A young man named Peter.

EDWARD. Peter? Peter who?

REILLY. Mr. Peter Quilpe
Was a frequent guest.

EDWARD. Peter Quilpe.
Peter Quilpe! Really Lavinia!
I congratulate you. You could not have chosen
Anyone I was less likely to suspect.
And then he came to *me* to confide about Celia!
I have never heard anything so utterly ludicrous:
This is the best joke that ever happened.

LAVINIA. I never knew you had such a sense of humour.

REILLY. It is the first more hopeful symptom.

LAVINIA. How did you know all this?

REILLY. That I cannot disclose.
I have my own method of collecting information
About my patients. You must not ask me to reveal it —
That is a matter of professional etiquette.

LAVINIA. I have not noticed much professional etiquette
About your behaviour to-day.

REILLY. A point well taken.
But permit me to remark that my revelations
About each of you, to one another,
Have not been of anything that you confided to me.
The information I have exchanged between you
Was all obtained from outside sources.
Mrs. Chamberlayne, when you came to me two months ago
I was dissatisfied with your explanation

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

**Of your obvious symptoms of emotional strain
And so I made enquiries.**

EDWARD. It was two months ago
That your breakdown began! and I never noticed it.

LAVINIA. You wouldn't notice anything. You never noticed *me*.

REILLY. Now, I want to point out to both of you
How much you have in common. Indeed, I consider
That you are exceptionally well-suited to each other.
Mr. Chamberlayne, when you thought your wife had left you,
You discovered, to your surprise and consternation,
That you were not really in love with Miss Coplestone . . .

LAVINIA. My husband has never been in love with anybody.

REILLY. And were not prepared to make the least sacrifice
On her account. This injured your vanity.
You liked to think of yourself as a passionate lover.
Then you realised, what your wife has justly remarked,
That you had never been in love with anybody;
Which made you suspect that you were incapable
Of loving. To men of a certain type
The suspicion that they are incapable of loving
Is as disturbing to their self-esteem
As, in cruder men, the fear of impotence.

LAVINIA. You *are* cold-hearted, Edward.

REILLY.

And now, let us turn to your side of the problem.
When you discovered that your young friend
(Though you knew, in your heart, that he was not in love with you,
And were always humiliated by the awareness
That you had forced him into this position) —
When, I say, you discovered that your young friend
Had actually fallen in love with Miss Coplestone,
It took you some time, I have no doubt,
Before you would admit it. Though perhaps you knew it
Before he did. You pretended to yourself,
I suspect, and for as long as you could,
That he was aiming at a higher social distinction
Than the honour conferred by being *your* lover.
When you had to face the fact that his feelings towards her
Were different from any you had aroused in him —
It was a shock. You had wanted to be loved;

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

You had come to see that no one had ever loved you.

Then you began to fear that no one *could* love you. "

EDWARD. I'm beginning to feel very sorry for you, Lavinia.

You know, you really are exceptionally unlovable,

And I never quite knew why. I thought it was *my* fault.

REILLY. And now you begin to see, I hope,

How much you have in common. The same isolation.

A man who finds himself incapable of loving

And a woman who finds that no man can love her.

LAVINIA. It seems to me that what we have in common

Might be just enough to make us loathe one another.

REILLY. See it rather as the bond which holds you together.

While still in a state of unenlightenment,

You could always say: 'he could not love any woman;'

You could always say: 'no man could love her.'

You could accuse each other of your own faults,

And so could avoid understanding each other.

Now, you have only to reverse the propositions

And put them together.

LAVINIA. Is that possible?

REILLY. If I had sent either of you to the sanatorium

In the state in which you came to me — I tell you this:

It would have been a horror beyond your imagining,

For you would have been left with what you brought with you:

The shadow of desires of desires. A prey

To the devils who arrive at their plenitude of power

When they have you to themselves.

LAVINIA. Then what can we do

When we can go neither back nor forward? Edward!

What can we do?

REILLY. You have answered your own question,

Though you do not know the meaning of what you have
said.

EDWARD. Lavinia, we must make the best of a bad job.

That is what he means.

REILLY. When you find, Mr. Chamberlayne,

The best of a bad job is all any of us make of it —

Except of course, the saints — such as those who go

To the sanatorium — you will forget this phrase,

And in forgetting it will alter the condition.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

LAVINIA. Edward, there *is* that hotel in the New Forest
If you want to go there. The proprietor
Who has just taken over, is a friend of Alex's.
I could go down with you, and then leave you there
If you want to be alone . . .

EDWARD. But I can't go away!
I have a case coming on next Monday.

LAVINIA. Then will you stop at your club?

EDWARD. No, they won't let me.
I must leave tomorrow — but how did you know
I was staying at the club?

LAVINIA. Really, Edward!
I have *some* sense of responsibility.
I was going to leave some shirts there for you.

EDWARD. It seems to me that I might as well go home.

LAVINIA. Then we can share a taxi, and be economical.
Edward, have you anything else to ask him
Before we go?

EDWARD. Yes, I have.
But it's difficult to say.

LAVINIA. But I wish you would say it.
At least, there is something I would like you to ask.

EDWARD. It's about the future of . . . the others.
I don't want to build on other people's ruins.

LAVINIA. Exactly. And I have a question too.
Sir Henry, was it you who sent those telegrams?

REILLY. I think I will dispose of your husband's problem
[To EDWARD] Your business is not to clear your conscience
But to learn how to bear the burdens on your conscience.
With the future of the others you are not concerned.

LAVINIA. I think you have answered my question too.
They had to tell us, themselves, that they had made their decision.

EDWARD. Have you anything else to say to us, Sir Henry?

REILLY. No. Not in this capacity.
[EDWARD takes out his cheque-book. REILLY raises his hand]
My secretary will send you my account.
Go in peace. And work out your salvation with diligence.

[Exeunt EDWARD and LAVINIA]

[REILLY goes to the couch and lies down. The house-telephone rings. He
gets up and answers it.]

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

REILLY. Yes? . . . Yes. Come in.

[Enter JULIA by side door]

She's waiting downstairs.

JULIA. I know that, Henry. I brought her here myself.

REILLY. Oh? You didn't let her know you were seeing me first?

JULIA. Of course not. I dropped her at the door

And went on in the taxi, round the corner;

Waited a moment, and slipped in by the back way.

I only came to tell you, I am sure she is ready

To make a decision.

REILLY. Was she reluctant?

Was that why you brought her?

JULIA. Oh no, not reluctant:

Only diffident. She cannot believe

That you will take her seriously.

REILLY. That is not uncommon.

JULIA. Or that she deserves to be taken seriously.

REILLY. That is most uncommon.

JULIA. Henry, get up.

You can't be as tired as that. I shall wait in the next room,

And come back when she's gone.

REILLY. Yes, when she's gone.

JULIA. Will Alex be here?

REILLY. Yes, he'll be here.

[Exit JULIA by side door]

[REILLY presses button. NURSE-SECRETARY shows in CELIA]

REILLY. Miss Celia Coplestone? . . . Won't you sit down?

I believe you are a friend of Mrs. Shuttlethwaite.

CELIA. Yes, it was Julia . . . Mrs. Shuttlethwaite

Who advised me to come to you. — But I've met you before,

Haven't I, somewhere? . . . Oh, of course.

But I didn't know . . .

REILLY. There is nothing you need to know.

I was there at the instance of Mrs. Shuttlethwaite.

CELIA. That makes it even more perplexing. However,

I don't want to waste your time. And I'm awfully afraid

That you'll think that I am wasting it anyway.

I suppose most people, when they come to see you,

Are obviously ill, or can give good reasons

For wanting to see you. Well, I can't.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

I just came in desperation. And I shan't be offended
If you simply tell me to go away again.

REILLY. Most of my patients begin, Miss Coplestone,
By telling me exactly what is the matter with them,
And what I am to do about it. They are quite sure
They have had a nervous breakdown — that is what they call it —
And usually they think that someone else is to blame.

CELIA. I at least have no one to blame but myself.

REILLY. And after that, the prologue to my treatment
Is to try to show them that they are mistaken
About the nature of their illness, and lead them to see
That it's not so interesting as they had imagined.
When I get as far as that, there is something to be done.

CELIA. Well, I can't pretend that my trouble is interesting;
But I shan't begin that way. I feel perfectly well.
I could lead an active life — if there's anything to work for;
I don't imagine that I am being persecuted;
I don't hear any voices, I have no delusions —
Except that the world I live in seems all a delusion!
But oughtn't I first to tell you the circumstances?
I'd forgotten that you know nothing about me;
And with what I've been going through, these last weeks,
I somehow took it for granted that I needn't explain myself.

REILLY. I know quite enough about you for the moment:
Try first to describe your present state of mind.

CELIA. Well, there are two things I can't understand,
Which you might consider symptoms. But first I must tell you
That I should really *like* to think there's something wrong with
me —

Because, if there isn't, then there's something wrong,
Or at least, very different from what it seemed to be,
With the world itself — and that's much more frightening!
That would be terrible. So I'd rather believe
There is something wrong with me, that could be put right.
I'd do anything you told me, to get back to normality.

REILLY. We must find out about you, before we decide
What *is* normality. You say there are two things:
What is the first?

CELIA. An awareness of solitude.
But that sounds so flat. I don't mean simply

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

That there's been a crash: though indeed there has been.
It isn't simply the end of an illusion
In the ordinary way, or being ditched.
Of course that's something that's always happening
To all sorts of people, and they get over it
More or less, or at least they carry on.
No. I mean that what has happened has made me aware
That I've always been alone. That one always is alone.
Not simply the ending of one relationship,
Not even simply finding that it never existed —
But a revelation about my relationship
With *everybody*. Do you know —
It no longer seems worth while to *speak* to anyone!

REILLY. And what about your parents?

CELIA. Oh, they live in the country,
Now they can't afford to have a place in town.
It's all they can do to keep the country house going:
But it's been in the family so long, they won't leave it.

REILLY. And you live in London?

CELIA. I share a flat
With a cousin: but she's abroad at the moment,
And my family want me to come down and stay with them.
But I just can't face it.

REILLY. So you want to see no one?

CELIA. No . . . it isn't that I *want* to be alone,
But that everyone's alone — or so it seems to me.
They make noises, and think they are talking to each other;
They make faces, and think they understand each other.
And I'm sure that they don't. Is that a delusion?

REILLY. A delusion is something we must return from.
There are other states of mind, which we take to be delusion,
But which we have to accept and go on from.
And the second symptom?

CELIA. That's stranger still.
It sounds ridiculous — but the only word for it
That I can find, is a sense of sin.

REILLY. You suffer from a sense of sin, Miss Coplestone?
This is most unusual.

CELIA. It seemed to *me* abnormal.

REILLY. We have yet to find what would be normal

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

For *you*, before we use the term 'abnormal'.

Tell me what you mean by a sense of sin.

CELIA. It's much easier to tell you what I don't mean:

I don't mean sin in the ordinary sense.

REILLY. And what, in your opinion, is the ordinary sense?

CELIA. Well . . . I suppose it's being immoral —

And I don't feel as if I was immoral:

In fact, aren't the people one thinks of as immoral

Just the people who we say have no moral sense?

I've never noticed that immorality

Was accompanied by a sense of sin:

At least, I have never come across it.

I suppose it is wicked to hurt other people

If you know that you're hurting them. I haven't hurt
her.

I wasn't taking anything away from her —

Anything she wanted. I may have been a fool:

But I don't mind at all having been a fool.

REILLY. And what is the point of view of your family?

CELIA. Well, my bringing up was pretty conventional —

I had always been taught to disbelieve in sin.

Oh, I don't mean that it was ever mentioned!

But anything wrong, from our point of view,

Was either bad form, or was psychological.

And bad form always led to disaster

Because the people one knew disapproved of it.

I don't worry much about form, myself —

But when everything's bad form, or mental kinks,

You either become bad form, and cease to care,

Or else, if you care, you must be kinky.

REILLY. And so you suppose you have what you call a 'kink'?

CELIA. But everything seemed so right, at the time!

I've been thinking about it, over and over;

I can see now, it was all a mistake:

But I don't see why mistakes should make one feel sinful!

And yet I can't find any other word for it.

It must be some kind of hallucination;

Yet, at the same time, I'm frightened by the fear

That it is more real than anything I believed in.

REILLY. What is more real than anything you believed in?

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

CELIA. It's not the feeling of anything I've ever *done*,
Which I might get away from, or of anything in me
I could get rid of — but of emptiness, of failure
Towards someone, or something, outside of myself;
And I feel I must . . . *atone* — is that the word?
Can you treat a patient for such a state of mind?

REILLY. What had you believed were your relations with this man?

CELIA. Oh, you'd guessed that, had you? That's clever of you.
No, perhaps I made it obvious. You don't need to know
About him, do you?

REILLY. No.

CELIA. Perhaps I'm only typical.

REILLY. There are different types. Some are rarer than others.

CELIA. Oh, I thought that I was giving him so much!
And he to me — and the giving and the taking
Seemed so right: not in terms of calculation
Of what was good for the persons we had been
But for the new person, *us*. If I could feel
As I did then, even now it would seem right.
And then I found we were only strangers
And that there had been neither giving nor taking
But that we had merely made use of each other
Each for his purpose. That's horrible. Can we only love
Something created by our own imagination?
Are we all in fact unloving and unlovable?
Then one *is* alone, and if one is alone
Then lover and beloved are equally unreal
And the dreamer is no more real than his dreams.

REILLY. And this man. What does he now seem like, to you?

CELIA. Like a child who has wandered into a forest
Playing with an imaginary playmate
And suddenly discovers he is only a child
Lost in a forest, wanting to go home.

REILLY. Compassion may be already a clue
Towards finding your own way out of the forest.

CELIA. But even if I find my way out of the forest
I shall be left with the inconsolable memory
Of the treasure I went into the forest to find
And never found, and which was not there
And perhaps is not anywhere? But if not anywhere,

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Why do I feel guilty at not having found it?

REILLY. Disillusion can become itself an illusion

If we rest in it.

CELIA. I cannot argue.

It's not that I'm afraid of being hurt again:

Nothing again can either hurt or heal.

I have thought at moments that the ecstasy is real

Although those who experience it may have no reality.

For what happened is remembered like a dream

In which one is exalted by intensity of loving

In the spirit, a vibration of delight

Without desire, for desire is fulfilled

In the delight of loving. A state one does not know

When awake. But what, or whom I loved,

Or what in me was loving, I do not know.

And if that is all meaningless, I want to be cured

Of a craving for something I cannot find

And of the shame of never finding it.

Can you cure me?

REILLY. The condition is curable.

But the form of treatment must be your own choice:

I cannot choose for you. If that is what you wish,

I can reconcile you to the human condition,

The condition to which some who have gone as far as you

Have succeeded in returning. They may remember

The vision they have had, but they cease to regret it,

Maintain themselves by the common routine,

Learn to avoid excessive expectation,

Become tolerant of themselves and others,

Giving and taking, in the usual actions

What there is to give and take. They do not repine;

Are contented with the morning that separates

And with the evening that brings together

For casual talk before the fire

Two people who know they do not understand each other,

Breeding children whom they do not understand

And who will never understand them.

CELIA. Is that the best life?

REILLY. It is a good life. Though you will not know how good

Till you come to the end. But you will want nothing else,

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

And the other life will be only like a book
You have read once, and lost. In a world of lunacy,
Violence, stupidity, greed . . . it is a good life.

CELIA. I know I ought to be able to accept that
If I might still have it. Yet it leaves me cold.
Perhaps that's just a part of my illness,
But I feel it would be a kind of surrender —
No, not a surrender — more like a betrayal.
You see, I think I really had a vision of something
Though I don't know what it is. I don't want to forget it.
I want to live with it. I could do without everything,
Put up with anything, if I might cherish it.
In fact, I think it would really be dishonest
For me, now, to try to make a life with *anybody*!
I couldn't give anyone the kind of love —
I wish I could — which belongs to that life.
Oh, I'm afraid this sounds like raving!
Or just cantankerousness . . . still,
If there's no other way . . . then I feel just hopeless.

REILLY. There *is* another way, if you have the courage.
The first I could describe in familiar terms
Because you have seen it, as we all have seen it,
Illustrated, more or less, in lives of those about us.
The second is unknown, and so requires faith —
The kind of faith that issues from despair.
The destination cannot be described;
You will know very little until you get there;
You will journey blind. But the way leads towards possession
Of what you have sought for in the wrong place.

CELIA. That sounds like what I want. But what is my duty?

REILLY. Whichever way you choose will prescribe its own duty.

CELIA. Which way is better?

REILLY. Neither way is better.

Both ways are necessary. It is also necessary
To make a choice between them.

CELIA. Then I choose the second.

REILLY. It is a terrifying journey.

CELIA. I am not frightened

But glad. I suppose it is a lonely way?

REILLY. No lonelier than the other. But those who take the other

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Can forget their loneliness. You will not forget yours.
Each way means loneliness — and communion.
Both ways avoid the final desolation
Of solitude in the phantasmal world
Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires.

CELIA. That is the hell I have been in.

REILLY. It isn't hell

Till you become incapable of anything else.

Now — do you feel quite sure?

CELIA. I want your second way.

So what am I to do?

REILLY. You will go to the sanatorium.

CELIA. Oh, what an anti-climax! I have known people
Who have been to your sanatorium, and come back again —
I don't mean to say they weren't much better for it —
That's why I came to you. But they returned . . .
Well . . . I mean . . . to everyday life.

REILLY. True. But the friends you have in mind

Cannot have been to this sanatorium.

I am very careful whom I send there:

Those who go do not come back as these did.

CELIA. It sounds like a prison. But they can't *all* stay there!

I mean, it would make the place so over-crowded.

REILLY. Not very many go. But I said they did not come back

In the sense in which your friends came back.

I did not say they stayed there.

CELIA. What becomes of them?

REILLY. They choose, Miss Coplestone. Nothing is forced on them.

Some of them return, in a physical sense;

No one disappears. They lead very active lives

Very often, in the world.

CELIA. How soon will you send me there?

REILLY. How soon will you be ready?

CELIA. Tonight, by nine o'clock.

REILLY. Go home then, and make your preparations.

Here is the address for you to give your friends;

[Writes on a slip of paper]

You had better let your family know at once.

I will send a car for you at nine o'clock.

CELIA. What do I need to take with me?

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

REILLY. Nothing.

Everything you need will be provided for you,
And you will have no expenses at the sanatorium.

CELIA. I don't in the least know what I am doing
Or why I am doing it. There is nothing else to do:
That is the only reason.

REILLY. It is the best reason.

CELIA. But I know it is I who have made the decision:
I must tell you that. Oh, I almost forgot —
May I ask what your fee is?

REILLY. I have told my secretary
That there is no fee.

CELIA. But . . .

REILLY. For a case like yours
There is no fee.

[*Presses button*]

CELIA. You have been very kind.

REILLY. Go in peace, my daughter.

Work out your salvation with diligence.

[NURSE-SECRETARY *appears at door. Exit CELIA. REILLY dials on house-telephone.*]

REILLY [*into telephone*]. It is finished. You can come in now.

[*Enter JULIA by side door*]

She will go far, that one.

JULIA. Very far, I think.

You do not need to tell me. I knew from the beginning.

REILLY. It's the other ones I am worried about.

JULIA. Nonsense, Henry. I shall keep an eye on them.

REILLY. To send them back: what have they to go back to?

To the stale food mouldering in the larder,

The stale thoughts mouldering in their minds.

Each unable to disguise his own meanness

From himself, because it is known to the other.

It's not the knowledge of the mutual treachery

But the knowledge that the other understands the motive —

Mirror to mirror, reflecting vanity.

I have taken a great risk.

JULIA. We must always take risks.

That is our destiny. Since you question the decision

What possible alternative can you imagine?

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

REILLY. None.

JULIA. Very well then. We must take the risk.
All we could do was to give them the chance.
And now, when they are stripped naked to their souls
And can choose, whether to put on proper costumes
Or huddle quickly into new disguises,
They have, for the first time, somewhere to start from.
Oh, of course, they might just murder each other !
But I don't think they will do that. We shall see.
It's the thought of Celia that weighs upon my mind.

REILLY. Of Celia?

JULIA. Of Celia.

REILLY. But when I said just now
That she would go far, you agreed with me.

JULIA. Oh yes, she will go far. And we know where she is going.
But what do we know of the terrors of the journey?
You and I don't know the process by which the human is
Transhumanised: what do we know
Of the kind of suffering they must undergo
On the way of illumination?

REILLY. Will she be frightened
By the first appearance of projected spirits?

JULIA. Henry, you simply do not understand innocence.
She will be afraid of nothing; she will not even know
That there is anything there to be afraid of.
She is too humble. She will pass between the scolding hills,
Through the valley of derision, like a child sent on an errand
In eagerness and patience. Yet she must suffer.

REILLY. When I express confidence in anything
You always raise doubts; when I am apprehensive
Then you see no reason for anything but confidence.

JULIA. That's one way in which I am so useful to you.
You ought to be grateful.

REILLY. And when I say to one like her
'Work out your salvation with diligence', I do not understand
What I myself am saying.

JULIA. You must accept your limitations.
— But how much longer will Alex keep us waiting?

REILLY. He should be here by now. I'll speak to Miss Barraway.
[Takes up house-telephone]

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Miss Barraway, when Mr. Gibbs arrives . . .

Oh, very good.

[To JULIA] He's on his way up.

[Into telephone]

You may bring the tray in now, Miss Barraway.

[Enter ALEX]

ALEX. Well! Well! and how have we got on?

JULIA. Everything is in order.

ALEX. The Chamberlaynes have chosen?

REILLY. They accept their destiny.

ALEX. And *she* has made the choice?

REILLY. She will be fetched this evening.

[NURSE-SECRETARY enters with a tray, a decanter and three glasses, and exits. REILLY pours drinks.]

And now we are ready to proceed to the libation.

ALEX. The words for the building of the hearth.

[They raise their glasses]

REILLY. Let them build the hearth

Under the protection of the stars.

ALEX. Let them place a chair each side of it.

JULIA. May the holy ones watch over the roof,

May the moon herself influence the bed.

[They drink]

ALEX. The words for those who go upon a journey.

REILLY. Protector of travellers

Bless the road.

ALEX. Watch over her in the desert.

Watch over her in the mountain.

Watch over her in the labyrinth.

Watch over her by the quicksand.

JULIA.

Protect her from the Voices

Protect her from the Visions

Protect her in the tumult

Protect her in the silence.

[They drink]

REILLY. There is one for whom the words cannot be spoken.

ALEX. They can not be spoken yet.

JULIA. You mean Peter Quilpe.

REILLY. He has not yet come to where the words are valid.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

JULIA. Shall we ever speak them?

ALEX. Others, perhaps, will speak them.

You know, I have connections — even in California.

CURTAIN

Act Three

*The drawing-room of the Chamberlaynes' London flat. Two years later.
A late afternoon in July. A CATERER'S MAN is arranging a buffet
table. LAVINIA enters from side door.*

CATERER'S MAN. Have you any further orders for us, Madam?

LAVINIA. You could bring in the trolley with the glasses

And leave them ready.

CATERER'S MAN. Very good, Madam.

[Exit. LAVINIA looks about the room critically and moves a bowl of flowers.]

[Re-enter CATERER'S MAN with trolley]

LAVINIA. There, in that corner. That's the most convenient;

You can get in and out. Is there anything you need

That you can't find in the kitchen?

CATERER'S MAN. Nothing, Madam.

Will there be anything more you require?

LAVINIA. Nothing more, I think, till half past six.

[Exit CATERER'S MAN]

[EDWARD lets himself in at the front door]

EDWARD. I'm in good time, I think. I hope you've not been worrying.

LAVINIA. Oh no. I did in fact ring up your chambers,

And your clerk told me you had already left.

But all I rang up for was to reassure you . . .

EDWARD [smiling]. That you hadn't run away?

LAVINIA. Now Edward, that's unfair!

You know that we've given *several* parties

In the last two years. And I've attended *all* of them.

I hope you're not too tired?

EDWARD. Oh no, a quiet day.

Two consultations with solicitors

On quite straightforward cases. It's you who should be tired.

LAVINIA. I'm not tired yet. But I know that I'll be glad

When it's all over.

EDWARD. I like the dress you're wearing:

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

I'm glad you put on that one.

LAVINIA.

Well, Edward!

Do you know it's the first time you've paid me a compliment
Before a party? And that's when one needs them.

EDWARD. Well, you deserve it. — We asked too many people.

LAVINIA. It's true, a great many more accepted

Than we thought would want to come. But what can you do?

There's usually a lot who don't want to come

But all the same would be bitterly offended

To hear we'd given a party without asking them.

EDWARD. Perhaps we ought to have arranged to have two parties
Instead of one.

LAVINIA. That's never satisfactory.

Everyone who's asked to either party

Suspects that the other one was more important.

EDWARD. That's true. You have a very practical mind.

LAVINIA. But you know, I don't think that you need worry:

They won't all come, out of those who accepted.

You know we said, 'we can ask twenty more

Because they will be going to the Gunnings instead'.

EDWARD. I know, that's what we said at the time;

But I'd forgotten what the Gunnings' parties were like.

Their guests will get just enough to make them thirsty;

They'll come on to us later, roaring for drink.

Well, let's hope that those who come to us early

Will be going on to the Gunnings afterwards,

To make room for those who come from the Gunnings.

LAVINIA. And if it's very crowded, they can't get at the
cocktails,

And the man won't be able to take the tray about,

So they'll go away again. Anyway, at that stage

There's nothing whatever you can do about it:

And everyone likes to be seen at a party

Where everybody else is, to show they've been invited.

That's what makes it a success. Is that picture straight?

EDWARD. Yes, it is.

LAVINIA. No, it isn't. Do please straighten it.

EDWARD. Is it straight now?

LAVINIA. Too much to the left.

EDWARD. How's that now?

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

LAVINIA. No, I meant the right.

That will do. I'm too tired to bother.

EDWARD. After they're all gone, we will have some champagne,
Just ourselves. You lie down now, Lavinia
No one will be coming for at least half an hour;
So just stretch out.

LAVINIA. You must sit beside me,
Then I can relax.

EDWARD. This is the best moment
Of the whole party.

LAVINIA. Oh no, Edward.
The best moment is the moment it's over;
And then to remember, it's the end of the season
And no more parties.

EDWARD. And no more committees.

LAVINIA. Can we get away soon?

EDWARD. By the end of next week
I shall be quite free.

LAVINIA. And we can be alone.
I love that house being so remote.

EDWARD. That's why we took it. And I'm really thankful
To have that excuse for not seeing people;
And you do need to rest now.

[*The doorbell rings*]

LAVINIA. Oh, bother!

Now who would come so early? I simply *can't* get up.

CATERER'S MAN. Mrs. Shuttlethwaite!

LAVINIA. Oh, it's Julia!

[*Enter JULIA*]

JULIA. Well, my dears, and here I am!

I seem *literally* to have caught you napping!

I know I'm much too early; but the fact is, my dears,

That I have to go on to the Gunnings' party —

And you know what *they* offer in the way of food and drink!

And I've had to miss my tea, and I'm simply ravenous

And dying of thirst. What can Parkinson's do for me?

Oh yes, I know this is a Parkinson party;

I recognised one of their men at the door —

An old friend of mine, in fact. But I'm forgetting!

I've got a surprise: I've brought Alex with me!

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

He only got back this morning from somewhere —
One of his mysterious expeditions,
And we're going to get him to tell us all about it.
But what's become of him?

[Enter ALEX]

EDWARD. Well, Alex!

Where on earth do you turn up from?

ALEX. Where on earth? From the East. From Kinkanja —
An island that you won't have heard of
Yet. Got back this morning. I heard about your party
And, as I thought you might be leaving for the country,
I said, I must not miss the opportunity
To see Edward and Lavinia.

LAVINIA. How are you, Alex?

ALEX. I did try to get you on the telephone
After lunch, but my secretary couldn't get through to you.
Never mind, I said — to myself, not to her —
Never mind: the unexpected guest
Is the one to whom they give the warmest welcome.
I know them well enough for that.

JULIA. But tell us, Alex.
What were you doing in this strange place —
What's it called?

ALEX. Kinkanja.

JULIA. What were you doing
In Kinkanja? Visiting some Sultan?
You were shooting tigers?

ALEX. There are no tigers, Julia,
In Kinkanja. And there are no sultans.
I have been staying with the Governor.
Three of us have been out on a tour of inspection
Of local conditions.

JULIA. What about? Monkey nuts?

ALEX. That was a nearer guess than you think.
No, not monkey nuts. But it had to do with monkeys —
Though whether the monkeys are the core of the problem
Or merely a symptom, I am not so sure.
At least, the monkeys have become the pretext
For general unrest amongst the natives.
EDWARD. But how do the monkeys create unrest?

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

ALEX. To begin with, the monkeys are very destructive . . .

JULIA. You don't need to tell me that monkeys are destructive.

I shall never forget Mary Mallington's monkey,
The horrid little beast — stole my ticket to Mentone
And I had to travel in a very slow train
And in a *couchette*. She was very angry
When I told her the creature ought to be destroyed.

LAVINIA. But can't they exterminate these monkeys
If they are a pest?

ALEX. Unfortunately,
The majority of the natives are heathen:
They hold these monkeys in peculiar veneration
And do not want them killed. So they blame the Government
For the damage that the monkeys do.

EDWARD. That seems unreasonable.

ALEX. It is unreasonable,
But characteristic. And that's not the worst of it.
Some of the tribes are Christian converts,
And, naturally, take a different view.
They trap the monkeys. And they eat them.
The young monkeys are extremely palatable:
I've cooked them myself . . .

EDWARD. And did anybody eat them
When you cooked them?

ALEX. Oh yes, indeed.
I invented for the natives several new recipes.
But you see, what with eating the monkeys
And what with protecting their crops from the monkeys
The Christian natives prosper exceedingly:
And that creates friction between them and the others.
And that's the real problem. I hope I'm not boring you?

EDWARD. No indeed: we are anxious to learn the solution.

ALEX. I'm not sure that there *is* any solution.
But even this does not bring us to the heart of the matter.
There are also foreign agitators,
Stirring up trouble . . .

LAVINIA. Why don't you expel them?

ALEX. They are citizens of a friendly neighbouring state
Which we have just recognised. You see, Lavinia,
These are very deep waters.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

EDWARD. And the agitators;

How do they agitate?

ALEX. By convincing the heathen

That the slaughter of monkeys has put a curse on them
Which can only be removed by slaughtering the Christians.
They have even been persuading some of the converts —
Who, after all, prefer not to be slaughtered —
To relapse into heathendom. So, instead of eating monkeys
They are eating Christians.

JULIA. Who have eaten monkeys.

ALEX. The native is not, I fear, very logical.

JULIA. I wondered where you were taking us, with your
monkeys.

I thought I was going to dine out on those monkeys:
But one can't dine out on eating Christians —
Even among pagans!

ALEX. Not on the *whole* story.

EDWARD. And have any of the English residents been murdered?

ALEX. Yes, but they are not usually eaten.

When these people have done with a European
He is, as a rule, no longer fit to eat.

EDWARD. And what has your commission accomplished?

ALEX. We have just drawn up an interim report.

EDWARD. Will it be made public?

ALEX. It cannot be, at present:
There are too many international complications.
Eventually, there may be an official publication.

EDWARD. But when?

ALEX. In a year or two.

EDWARD. And meanwhile?

ALEX. Meanwhile the monkeys multiply.

LAVINIA. And the Christians?

ALEX. Ah, the Christians! Now, I think I ought to tell you
About someone you know — or knew . . .

JULIA. Edward!

Somebody must have walked over my grave:
I'm feeling so chilly. Give me some gin.
Not a cocktail. I'm freezing — in July!

CATERER'S MAN. Mr. Quilpe!

EDWARD. Now who . . .

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

[Enter PETER]

Why, it's Peter!

LAVINIA. Peter!

PETER. Hullo, everybody!

LAVINIA. When did you arrive?

PETER. I flew over from New York last night —

I left Los Angeles three days ago.

I saw Sheila Paisley at lunch to-day

And she told me you were giving a party —

She's coming on later, after the Gunnings —

So I said, I really must crash in:

It's my only chance to see Edward and Lavinia.

I'm only over for a week, you see,

And I'm driving down to the country this evening,

So I knew you wouldn't mind my looking in so early.

It does seem ages since I last saw any of you!

And how are you, Alex? And dear old Julia!

LAVINIA. So you've just come from New York.

PETER. Yes, from New York.

The Bologolomskys saw me off.

You remember Princess Bologolomsky

In the old days? We dined the other night

At the Saffron Monkey. That's the place to go now.

ALEX. How very odd. My monkeys are saffron.

PETER. Your monkeys, Alex? I always said

That Alex knew everybody. But I didn't know

That he knew any monkeys.

JULIA. But give us your news;

Give us your news of the world, Peter.

We lead such a quiet life, here in London.

PETER. You always did enjoy a leg-pull, Julia:

But you all know I'm working for Pan-Am-Eagle?

EDWARD. No. Tell us, what is Pan-Am-Eagle?

PETER. You must have been living a quiet life!

Don't you go to the movies?

LAVINIA. Occasionally.

PETER. Alex knows.

Did you see my last picture, Alex?

ALEX. I knew about it, but I didn't see it.

There is no cinema in Kinkanja.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

PETER. Kinkanja? Where's that? They don't have pictures?

Pan-Am-Eagle must look into this.

Perhaps it would be a good place to make one.

— Alex knows all about Pan-Am-Eagle:

It was he who introduced me to the great Bela.

JULIA. And who is the great Bela?

PETER. Why, Bela Szogody —

He's my boss. I thought everyone knew *his* name.

JULIA. Is he your connection in California, Alex?

ALEX. Yes, we have sometimes obliged each other.

PETER. Well, it was Bela sent me over

Just for a week. And I have my hands full

I'm going down tonight, to Boltwell.

JULIA. To stay with the Duke?

PETER. And do him a good turn.

We're making a film of English life

And we want to use Boltwell.

JULIA. But I understood that Boltwell

Is in a very decayed condition.

PETER. Exactly. It is. And that's why we're interested.

The most decayed noble mansion in England!

At least, of any that are still inhabited.

We've got a team of experts over

To study the decay, so as to reproduce it.

Then we build another Boltwell in California.

JULIA. But what is your position, Peter?

Have you become an expert on decaying houses?

PETER. Oh dear no! I've written the script of this film,

And Bela is very pleased with it.

He thought I should see the original Boltwell;

And besides, he thought that as I'm English

I ought to know the best way to handle a duke.

Besides that, we've got the casting director:

He's looking for some typical English faces —

Of course, only for minor parts —

And I'll help him decide what faces are typical.

JULIA. Peter, I've thought of a wonderful idea!

I've always wanted to go to California:

Couldn't you persuade your casting director

To take us all over? We're all very typical.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

PETER. No, I'm afraid . . .

CATERER'S MAN. Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly!

JULIA. Oh, I forgot! I'd another surprise for you.

[Enter REILLY]

I want you to meet Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly —

EDWARD. We're delighted to see him. But we *have* met before.

JULIA. Then if you know him already, you won't be afraid of him.

You know, I was afraid of him at first:

He looks so forbidding . . .

REILLY. My dear Julia,

You are giving me a very bad introduction —

Supposing that an introduction was necessary.

JULIA. My dear Henry, you are interrupting me.

LAVINIA. If you can interrupt Julia, Sir Henry,

You are the perfect guest we've been waiting for.

REILLY. I should not dream of trying to interrupt Julia . . .

JULIA. But you're both interrupting!

REILLY. Who is interrupting now?

JULIA. Well, you shouldn't interrupt my interruptions:

That's really worse than interrupting.

Now my head's fairly spinning. I must have a cocktail.

EDWARD. [To REILLY]. And will you have a cocktail?

REILLY. Might I have a glass of water?

EDWARD. Anything with it?

REILLY. Nothing, thank you.

LAVINIA. May I introduce Mr. Peter Quilpe?

Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly. Peter's an old friend

Of my husband and myself. Oh, I forgot —

[Turning to ALEX]

I rather assumed that you knew each other —

I don't know why I should. Mr. MacColgie Gibbs.

ALEX. Indeed, yes, we have met.

REILLY. On several commissions.

JULIA. We've been having such an interesting conversation.

Peter's just over from California

Where he's something very important in films.

He's making a film of English life

And he's going to find parts for all of us. Think of it!

PETER. But, Julia, I was just about to explain —

I'm afraid I can't find parts for anybody

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

In *this* film — it's not my business;
And that's not the way we do it.

JULIA. But, Peter;
If you're taking Boltwell to California
Why can't you take me?

PETER. We're not taking Boltwell.
We reconstruct a Boltwell.

JULIA. Very well, then:
Why not reconstruct *me*? It's very much cheaper.
Oh, dear, I can see you're determined not to have me:
So good-bye to my hopes of seeing California.

PETER. You know you'd never come if we invited you.
But there's someone I wanted to ask about,
Who did really want to get into films,
And I always thought she could make a success of it
If she only got the chance. It's Celia Coplestone.
She always wanted to. And now I could help her.
I've already spoken to Bela about her,
And I want to introduce her to our casting director.
I've got an idea for another film.
Can you tell me where she is? I couldn't find her
In the telephone directory.

JULIA. Not in the directory,
Or in any directory. You can tell them now, Alex.

LAVINIA. What does Julia mean?

ALEX. I was about to speak of her
When you came in, Peter. I'm afraid you can't have Celia.

PETER. Oh . . . Is she married?

ALEX. Not married, but dead.

LAVINIA. Celia?

ALEX. Dead.

PETER. Dead. That knocks the bottom out of it.

EDWARD. Celia dead.

JULIA. You had better tell them, Alex,
The news that you bring back from Kinkanja.

LAVINIA. Kinkanja? What was Celia doing in Kinkanja?
We heard that she had joined some nursing order . . .

ALEX. She had joined an order. A very austere one.
And as she already had experience of nursing . . .

LAVINIA. Yes, she had been a V.A.D. I remember.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

ALEX. She was directed to Kinkanja,
Where there are various endemic diseases
Besides, of course, those brought by Europeans,
And where the conditions are favourable to plague.

EDWARD. Go on.

ALEX. It seems that there were three of them —
Three sisters at this station, in a Christian village;
And half the natives were dying of pestilence.
They must have been overworked for weeks.

EDWARD. And then?

ALEX. And then, the insurrection broke out
Among the heathen, of which I was telling you.
They knew of it, but would not leave the dying natives.
Eventually, two of them escaped:
One died in the jungle, and the other
Will never be fit for normal life again.
But Celia Coplestone, she was taken.
When our people got there, they questioned the villagers —
Those who survived. And then they found her body,
Or at least, they found the traces of it.

EDWARD. But before that . . .

ALEX. It was difficult to tell.
But from what we know of local practices
It would seem that she must have been crucified
Very near an ant-hill.

LAVINIA. But Celia! . . . Of all people . . .

EDWARD. And just for a handful of plague-stricken natives
Who would have died anyway.

ALEX. Yes, the patients died anyway;
Being tainted with the plague, they were not eaten.

LAVINIA. Oh, Edward, I'm so sorry — what a feeble thing to say!
But you know what I mean.

EDWARD. And you know what I'm thinking.

PETER. I don't understand at all. But then I've been away
For two years, and I don't know what happened
To Celia, during those two years.
Two years! Thinking about Celia.

EDWARD. It's the waste that I resent.

PETER. You know more than I do:
For *me*, it's everything else that's a waste.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Two years! And it was all a mistake.

Julia! Why don't *you* say anything?

JULIA. You gave her those two years, as best you could.

PETER. When did she . . . take up this career?

JULIA. Two years ago.

PETER. Two years ago! I tried to forget about her,

Until I began to think myself a success

And got a little more self-confidence;

And then I thought about her again. More and more.

At first I did not want to know about Celia

And so I never asked. Then I wanted to know

And did not dare to ask. It took all my courage

To ask you about her just now; but I never thought

Of anything like this. I suppose I didn't know her,

I didn't understand her. I understand nothing.

REILLY. You understand your *métier*, Mr. Quilpe —

Which is the most that any of us can ask for.

PETER. And what a *métier*! I've tried to believe in it

So that I might believe in myself.

I thought I had ideas to make a revolution

In the cinema, that no one could ignore —

And here I am, making a second-rate film!

But I thought it was going to lead to something better,

And that seemed possible, while Celia was alive.

I wanted it, believed in it, for Celia.

And, of course, I wanted to do something for Celia —

But what mattered was, that Celia was alive.

And now it's all worthless. Celia's not alive.

LAVINIA. No, it's not all worthless, Peter. You've only just begun.

I mean, this only brings you to the point

At which you *must* begin. You were saying just now

That you never knew Celia. We none of us did.

What you've been living on is an image of Celia

Which you made for yourself, to meet your own needs.

Peter, please don't think I'm being unkind . . .

PETER. No, I don't think you're being unkind, Lavinia;

And I know that you're right.

LAVINIA. And perhaps what I've been saying

Will seem less unkind if I can make you understand

That in fact I've been talking about myself.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

EDWARD. Lavinia is right. This is where you start from.

If you find out now, Peter, things about yourself
That you don't like to face: well, just remember
That some men have to learn much worse things
About themselves, and learn them later
When it's harder to recover, and make a new beginning.
It's not so hard for you. You're naturally good.

PETER. I'm sorry. I don't believe I've taken in
All that you've been saying. But I'm grateful all the same.
You know, all the time that you've been talking,
One thought has been going round and round in my head —
That I've only been interested in myself:
And that isn't good enough for Celia.

JULIA. You must have learned how to look at people, Peter,
When you look at them with an eye for the films:
That is, when you're not concerned with yourself
But just being an eye. You will come to think of Celia
Like that, one day. And then you'll understand her
And be reconciled, and be happy in the thought of her.

LAVINIA. Sir Henry, there is something I want to say to you.
While Alex was telling us what had happened to Celia
I was looking at your face. And it seemed from your expression
That the way in which she died did not disturb you
Or the fact that she died because she would not leave
A few dying natives.

REILLY. Who knows, Mrs. Chamberlayne,
The difference that made to the natives who were dying
Or the state of mind in which they died?

LAVINIA. I'm willing to grant that. What struck me, though,
Was that your face showed no surprise or horror
At the way in which she died. I don't know if you knew her.
I suspect that you did. In any case you knew *about* her.
Yet I thought your expression was one of . . . satisfaction!

REILLY. Mrs. Chamberlayne, I must be very transparent
Or else you are very perceptive.

JULIA. Oh, Henry!
Lavinia is much more observant than you think.
I believe that she has forced you to a show-down.

REILLY. You state the position correctly, Julia.
Do you mind if I quote poetry, Mrs. Chamberlayne?

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

LAVINIA. Oh no, I should love to hear you speaking poetry . . .

JULIA. She has made a point, Henry.

LAVINIA.

. . . if it answers my question.

REILLY.

Ere Babylon was dust

The magus Zoroaster, my dead child,

Met his own image walking in the garden.

That apparition, sole of men, he saw.

For know there are two worlds of life and death:

One that which thou beholdest; but the other

Is underneath the grave, where do inhabit

The shadows of all forms that think and live

Till death unite them and they part no more!

When I first met Miss Coplestone, in this room,

I saw the image, standing behind her chair,

Of a Celia Coplestone whose face showed the astonishment

Of the first five minutes after a violent death.

If this strains your credulity, Mrs. Chamberlayne,

I ask you only to entertain the suggestion

That a sudden intuition, in certain minds,

May tend to express itself at once in a picture.

That happens to me, sometimes. So it was obvious

That here was a woman under sentence of death.

That was her destiny. The only question

Then was, what sort of death? *I* could not know;

Because it was for her to choose the way of life

To lead to death, and, without knowing the end

Yet choose the form of death. We know the death she chose.

I did not know that she would die in this way;

She did not know. So all that *I* could do

Was to direct her in the way of preparation.

That way, which she accepted, led to this death.

And if that is not a happy death, what death is happy?

EDWARD. Do you mean that having chosen this form of death

She did not suffer as ordinary people suffer?

REILLY. Not at all what *I* mean. Rather the contrary.

I'd say that she suffered all that we should suffer

In fear and pain and loathing — all these together —

And reluctance of the body to become a *thing*.

I'd say she suffered more, because more conscious

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

Than the rest of us. She paid the highest price
In suffering. That is part of the design.

LAVINIA. Perhaps she had been through greater agony beforehand.
I mean — I know nothing of her last two years.

REILLY. That shows some insight on your part, Mrs. Chamberlayne
But such experience can only be hinted at
In myths and images. To speak about it
We talk of darkness, labyrinths, Minotaur terrors.
But that world does not take the place of this one.
Do you imagine that the Saint in the desert
With spiritual evil always at his shoulder
Suffered any less from hunger, damp, exposure,
Bowel trouble, and the fear of lions,
Cold of the night and heat of the day, than we should?

EDWARD. But if this was right — if this was right for Celia —
There must be something else that is terribly wrong,
And the rest of us are somehow involved in the wrong.
I should only speak for myself. I'm sure that I am.

REILLY. Let me free your mind from one impediment:
You must try to detach yourself from what you still feel
As your responsibility.

EDWARD. I cannot help the feeling
That, in some way, my responsibility
Is greater than that of a band of half-crazed savages.

LAVINIA. Oh, Edward, I knew! I knew what you were thinking!
Doesn't it help you, that I feel guilty too?

REILLY. If we all were judged according to the consequences
Of all our words and deeds, beyond the intention
And beyond our limited understanding
Of ourselves and others, we should all be condemned.
Mrs. Chamberlayne, I often have to make a decision
Which may mean restoration or ruin to a patient —
And sometimes I have made the wrong decision.
As for Miss Coplestone, because you think her death was waste
You blame yourselves, and because you blame yourselves
You think her life was wasted. It was triumphant.
But I am no more responsible for the triumph —
And just as responsible for her death as you are.

LAVINIA. Yet I know I shall go on blaming myself
For being so unkind to her . . . so spiteful.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

I shall go on seeing her at the moment

When she said good-bye to us, two years ago.

EDWARD. Your responsibility is nothing to mine, Lavinia.

LAVINIA. I'm not sure about that. If I had understood you

Then I might not have misunderstood Celia.

REILLY. You will have to live with these memories and make them

Into something new. Only by acceptance

Of the past will you alter its meaning.

JULIA. Henry, I think it is time that I said something:

Everyone makes a choice, of one kind or another,

And then must take the consequences. Celia chose

A way of which the consequence was Kinkanja.

Peter chose a way that leads him to Boltwell:

And he's got to go there . . .

PETER. I see what you mean.

I wish I didn't have to. But the car will be waiting,

And the experts — I'd almost forgotten them.

I realise that I can't get out of it —

And what else can I do?

ALEX. It is your film.

And I know that Bela expects great things of it.

PETER. So now I'll be going.

EDWARD. Shall we see you again, Peter,

Before you leave England?

LAVINIA. Do try to come to see us.

You know, I think it would do us all good —

You and me and Edward . . . to talk about Celia.

PETER. Thanks very much. But not this time —

I simply shan't be able to.

EDWARD. But on your next visit?

PETER. The next time I come to England, I promise you.

I really do want to see you both, very much.

Good-bye, Julia. Good-bye, Alex. Good-bye, Sir Henry. [Exit]

JULIA. . . . And now the consequence of the Chamberlaynes' choice

Is a cocktail party. They must be ready for it.

Their guests may be arriving at any moment.

REILLY. Julia, you are right. It is also right

That the Chamberlaynes should now be giving a party.

LAVINIA. And I have been thinking, for these last five minutes,

How I could face my guests. I wish it was over.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY

I mean . . . I am glad you came . . . I am glad Alex told us . . .
And Peter had to know . . .

EDWARD. Now I think I understand . . .

LAVINIA. Then I hope you will explain it to me!

EDWARD. Oh, it isn't much
That I understand yet! But Sir Henry has been saying,
I think, that every moment is a fresh beginning;
And Julia, that life is only keeping on;
And somehow, the two ideas seem to fit together.

LAVINIA. But all the same . . . I don't want to see these people.

REILLY. It is your appointed burden. And as for the party,
I am sure it will be a success.

JULIA. And I think, Henry,
That we should leave before the party begins.
They will get on better without us. You too, Alex.

LAVINIA. We don't *want* you to go!

ALEX. We have another engagement.

REILLY. And on this occasion I shall not be unexpected.

JULIA. Now, Henry. Now, Alex. We're going to the Gunnings.

[*Exeunt JULIA, REILLY and ALEX*]

LAVINIA. Edward, how am I looking?

EDWARD. Very well.

I might almost say, your best. But you always look your best.

LAVINIA. Oh, Edward, that spoils it. No woman can believe
That she always looks her best. You're rather transparent,
You know, when you're trying to cheer me up.

To say I always look my best can only mean the worst.

EDWARD. I never shall learn how to pay a compliment.

LAVINIA. What you should have done was to admire my dress.

EDWARD. But I've already told you how much I like it.

LAVINIA. But so much has happened since then. And besides,
One sometimes likes to hear the same compliment twice.

EDWARD. And now for the party.

LAVINIA. Now for the party.

EDWARD. It will soon be over.

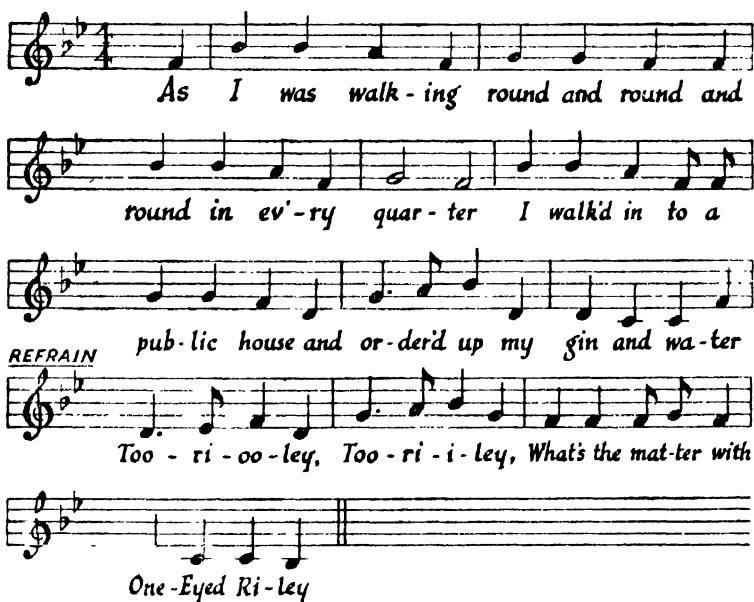
LAVINIA. I wish it would begin.

EDWARD. There's the doorbell.

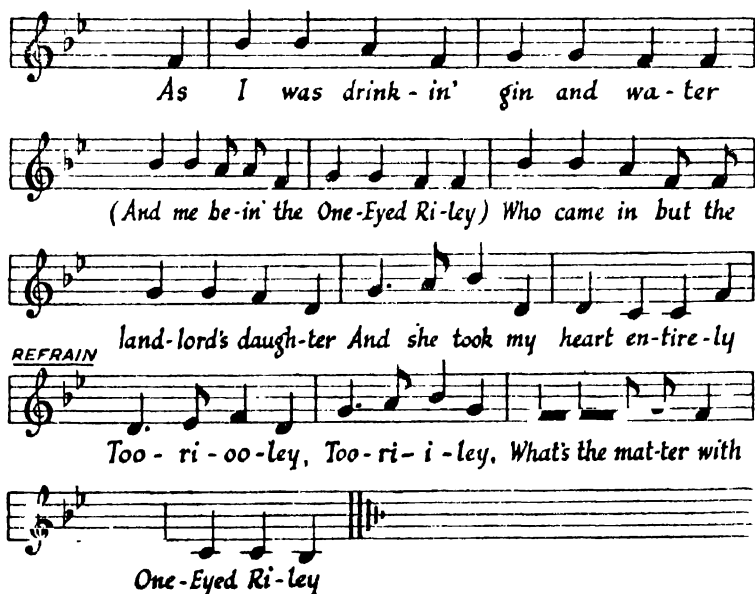
LAVINIA. Oh, I'm glad. It's begun.

CURTAIN

The tune of *One-eyed Riley* (page 137), as scored from the author's dictation by Miss Mary Trevelyan.



As I was walk - ing round and round and
round in ev'-ry quar - ter I walk'd in to a
pub - lic house and or - der'd up my gin and wa - ter
REFRAIN Too - ri - oo - ley, Too - ri - i - ley, What's the mat - ter with
One - Eyed Ri - ley



As I was drink - in' gin and wa - ter
(And me be-in' the One-Eyed Ri-ley) Who came in but the
land-lord's daugh - ter And she took my heart en - tire - ly
REFRAIN Too - ri - oo - ley, Too - ri - i - ley, What's the mat - ter with
One - Eyed Ri - ley

The Cast of the First Production
at the
Edinburgh Festival,

Edward Chamberlayne

Julia (Mrs. Shuttlethwaite)

Celia Coplestone

Alexander MacColgie Gibbs

Peter Quilpe

An Unidentified Guest, *later identified*

as Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly

Lavinia Chamberlayne

A Nurse-Secretary

Two Caterer's Men

ROBERT FLEMYNG

CATHLEEN NESBITT

IRENE WORTH

ERNEST CLARK

DONALD HOUSTON

ALEC GUINNESS

URSULA JEANS

CHRISTINA HORNIMAN

{ DONALD BAIN
{ MARTIN BECKWITH

Directed by E. MARTIN BROWNE

Settings designed by ANTHONY HOLLAND

Produced by SHEREK PLAYERS LTD.

in association with THE ARTS COUNCIL

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Characters

SIR CLAUDE MULHAMMER

EGGERSON

COLBY SIMPKINS

B. KAGHAN

LUCASTA ANGEL

LADY ELIZABETH MULHAMMER

MRS. GUZZARD

Act One

The Business Room on the first floor of SIR CLAUDE MULHAMMER'S London house. Early afternoon. SIR CLAUDE writing at desk. Enter EGGERSON.

SIR CLAUDE. Ah, there you are, Eggerson! Punctual as always.
I'm sorry to have to bring you up to London
All the way from Joshua Park, on an errand like this.
But you know my wife wouldn't like anyone to meet her
At Northolt, but you. And I couldn't send Colby.
That's not the way to arrange their first meeting,
On her return from Switzerland.

EGGERSON. Impossible, Sir Claude!

A very delicate situation —
Her first meeting with Mr. Simpkins.
But I was glad of the excuse for coming up to London:
I've spent the morning shopping! Gardening tools.
The number of things one needs for a garden!
And I thought, now's the moment to buy some new tools
So as not to lose a moment at the end of the winter.
And I matched some material for Mrs. E.,
Which she's been wanting. So *she*'ll be pleased.
Then I lunched at the store — they have a restaurant;
An excellent lunch, and cheap, for nowadays.
But where's Mr. Simpkins? Will he be here?

SIR CLAUDE. I had to send him to the City this morning,
But he'll be back, I hope, before you leave.

EGGERSON. And how's he getting on? Swimmingly, I'm sure,
As I've heard nothing since the last time I came.

SIR CLAUDE. Well, of course, Eggerson, you're irreplaceable . . .

EGGERSON. Oh, Sir Claude, you shouldn't say that!

Mr. Simpkins is far better qualified than I was

To be your confidential clerk.

He was finding his feet, very quickly,

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

During the time we worked together.

All he needs is confidence.

SIR CLAUDE. And experience.

With a young man, some readjustment is necessary.

But I'm satisfied that he's getting the hang of things,

And I think he's beginning to take a keen interest.

EGGERSON. And getting over his disappointment?

Of course, I never mentioned that:

It's only what you told me.

SIR CLAUDE. About his music.

Yes, I think so. I understand his feelings.

He's like me, Eggerson. The same disappointment

In a different form. He won't forget

That his great ambition was to be an organist,

Just as I can't forget . . . no matter.

The great thing was to find something else

He could do, and do well. And I think he's found it.

Just as I did. I shall tell him about myself.

But so far, I've left him to his own devices:

I thought he would fall into this way of life more quickly

If we started on a purely business basis.

EGGERSON. No doubt that's best. While he's still living

With his aunt in Teddington, and coming up daily

Just as I used to. And the flat in the mews?

How soon will that be ready for him?

SIR CLAUDE. They have still to do the walls. And then it must be furnished.

I'm trying to find him a really good piano.

EGGERSON. A piano? Yes, I'm sure he'll feel at home

When he has a piano. You think of everything.

But if I might make a suggestion: window boxes!

He's expressed such an interest in my garden

That I think he ought to have window boxes.

Some day, he'll want a garden of his own. And yes, a bird bath!

SIR CLAUDE. A bird bath? In the mews? What's the point of that?

EGGERSON. He told me he was very fond of bird watching.

SIR CLAUDE. But there won't be any birds — none worth watching.

EGGERSON. I don't know, Sir Claude. Only the other day

I read a letter in *The Times* about wild birds seen in London:

And I'm sure Mr. Simpkins will find them if anybody.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

SIR CLAUDE. Well, we'll leave that for the present. As we have a little time

Before you start for Northolt — the car will be ready —
Let's think what you're to say to Lady Elizabeth,
Coming back from the airport, about Colby.
I think, you ought to give her warning
Of whom she is to meet on her arrival.

EGGERSON. How would you like me to approach the subject?

SIR CLAUDE. Of course, she knows you were wanting to retire,
As we had some discussion about replacing you.
But you know she regards you — well, completely
As one of the household.

EGGERSON. That's a great compliment.

SIR CLAUDE. And well deserved; but rather inconvenient
When it comes to appointing a successor.
Makes it very difficult to replace you.
She thinks she ought to have a hand in the choosing;
And besides, she is convinced that she, of all people,
Is a better judge of character than I am.

EGGERSON. Oh, I wouldn't say that, Sir Claude!

She has too much respect for your business genius.
But it's true she believes she has what she calls 'guidance'.

SIR CLAUDE. Guidance. That's worse than believing in her judgment:
We could argue about that. You can't argue with guidance.
But if she appears to be puzzled, or annoyed
At my making the appointment during her absence,
You must say you had to leave under medical orders.
She's always been concerned about your state of health,
So she'll be sympathetic. And as for Colby —
Say that Mr. Simpkins was highly recommended,
And say that I had to make a quick decision
Because he'd had another very tempting offer.
Something like that. Don't make too much of it.
And I rather hope that she will take to him at once:
If so, she is certain to come to believe
That she chose him herself. By the way, don't forget
To let her know that he's very musical.
She can take him to concerts. But don't overdo it!

EGGERSON. I'll remember that. Music.

SIR CLAUDE. And by the way,

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

How much have you actually told him about her?
You remember, I asked you to prepare him a little;•
There are some things you could say better than I could,
And ways in which you could reassure him
Better than I. He's more at ease with you
Than he is with me.

EGGERSON. Oh, you mustn't say that!
Though I've done my best to gain his confidence.
I did mention her interest in Light from the East.

SIR CLAUDE. And the Book of Revelation? And the Wisdom of
Atlantis?

EGGERSON. Well, to tell the truth, Sir Claude, I only touched on these
matters,

They're much too deep for me. And I thought, Mr. Simpkins,
He's highly educated. He'll soon begin to grasp them.
No, I haven't told him much about Lady Elizabeth.
But there's one thing I should like to know —
If you don't mind — before I go to meet her.
How soon do you propose to . . . *explain* Mr. Simpkins?
Regularize his position in the household?
You told me that was your eventual intention.

SIR CLAUDE. When — or indeed whether — I reveal his identity
Depends on how she takes to him. This afternoon
She will only learn that you have finally retired
And that you have a young successor,
A Mr. Colby Simpkins.

EGGERSON. Merely Mr. Simpkins.

SIR CLAUDE. The reasons for starting him during her absence
Are perfectly clear. But beyond that point
I haven't yet explained my plans to you.
Why I've never told her about him,
The reason for meeting him as merely Mr. Simpkins,
Is, that she has a strong maternal instinct . . .

EGGERSON. I realise that.

SIR CLAUDE. Which has always been thwarted.

EGGERSON. I'm sure it's been a grief to both of you
That you've never had children.

SIR CLAUDE. No worse, Eggerston,
Than for you and your wife, to have had a son
Lost in action, and his grave unknown.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

EGGERSON. And you're thinking no doubt that Lady Elizabeth
Would be put in mind of the child *she* lost.

SIR CLAUDE. In a very different way, yes. You might say *mislaid*,
Since the father is dead, and there's no way of tracing it.
Yes, I was thinking of her missing child:
In the circumstances, that might make her jealous.
I've explained all this to Colby — Mr. Simpkins.

EGGERSON. I see what you mean.

SIR CLAUDE. She must get to like him first:
And then, Eggerston, I am not unhelpful
That, under the impression that he is an orphan,
She will want us to adopt him.

EGGERSON. Adopt him! Yes, indeed,
That would be the solution. Yes, quite ideal.

SIR CLAUDE. I'm glad you agree. Your support will be helpful.

EGGERSON. I'm sure I shall be very happy to commend him.

SIR CLAUDE. You mustn't overdo it! But your approval matters.
You know she thinks the world of your opinion.

EGGERSON. Well, I believe that once or twice, perhaps . . .
But I'm afraid you overrate my influence.
I have never been able to make her like Miss Angel;
She becomes abstracted, whenever I mention her.

SIR CLAUDE. But she knew about Lucasta — Miss Angel, from the
start.
That was one difficulty. And there are others.
For one, they're both of them women.

EGGERSON. True.

SIR CLAUDE. But I don't think she takes much notice of Miss Angel.
She just doesn't see her. And Miss Angel
Will soon be getting married, I expect.

EGGERSON. And so I hope. A most suitable arrangement.
But will you tell me this: if it comes to the point
At which Lady Elizabeth wants to adopt him —
An admirable solution — then what follows?
Will you let her know, then, that Mr. Simpkins
Is actually your son?

SIR CLAUDE. That's where I'm in the dark.
I simply can't guess what her reaction would be.
There's a lot I don't understand about my wife.
There's always something one's ignorant of

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

About anyone, however well one knows them;
And that may be something of the greatest importance.
It's when you're sure you understand a person
That you're liable to make the worst mistake about him.
As a matter of fact, there's a lot I don't know
About you, Eggerson, although we worked together
For nearly thirty years.

EGGERSON. Nearly thirty-one.
But now you put it so convincingly,
I must admit there's a lot that *I* don't understand
About my wife.

SIR CLAUDE. And just as much
She doesn't know about you. And just as much
You don't know about me — I'm not so sure of that!
My rule is to remember that I understand nobody,
But on the other hand never to be sure
That they don't understand me — a good deal better
Than I should care to think, perhaps.

EGGERSON. And do I infer
That you're not sure you understand Mr. Simpkins, either?

SIR CLAUDE. A timely reminder. You may have to repeat it.
But he should be back by now. And then I'll leave you.
I must telephone to Amsterdam, and possibly to Paris.
But when you return with Lady Elizabeth
I'll be ready waiting to introduce him.

[*Enter COLBY SIMPKINS with briefcase*]

SIR CLAUDE. Ah, Colby, I was just saying to Eggerson
It was time you were back. Was your morning satisfactory?

COLBY. I've got what you wanted, Sir Claude. Good afternoon,
Mr. Eggerson. I was afraid I'd miss you.

EGGERSON. I'm off in half an hour, Mr. Simpkins.

SIR CLAUDE. I'll leave you now. But when Eggerson comes back
With Lady Elizabeth, I will rejoin you.

[*Exit SIR CLAUDE*]

COLBY. I'm glad you don't have to leave just yet.
I'm rather nervous about this meeting.
You've told me very little about Lady Elizabeth,
And Sir Claude himself hasn't told me very much:
So I've no idea how I ought to behave.
B. Kaghan has told me something about her,

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

But that's rather alarming.

EGGERSON.

Mr. Kaghan is 'prejudiced.

He's never hit it off with Lady Elizabeth.

Don't listen to him. He understands Sir Claude,

And he's always been very grateful to Sir Claude,

As he ought to be. Sir Claude picked him out

And gave him his start. And he's made the most of it —

That I will say. An encouraging example

For you, Mr. Simpkins. He'll be a power in the City!

And he has a heart of gold. But not to beat about the bush,

He's rather a rough diamond. Very free and easy ways;

And Lady Elizabeth has never taken to him.

But you, Mr. Simpkins, that's very different.

COLBY. I don't know why it should be so different.

I like B. Kaghan. I've found him very helpful

And very good company apart from business.

EGGERSON. Oh yes, Mr. Kaghan is very good company.

He makes me laugh sometimes. I don't laugh easily.

Quite a humorist, he is. In fact, Mrs. E.

Sometimes says to me: 'Eggerson, why can't you make me laugh

The way B. Kaghan did?' She's only met him once;

But do you know, he began addressing her as Muriel —

Within the first ten minutes! I was horrified.

But she actually liked it. Muriel is her name.

He has a way with the ladies, you know.

But with Lady Elizabeth he wasn't so successful.

She once referred to him as 'undistinguished';

But with you, as I said, it will be very different.

She'll see at once that you're a man of culture;

And besides, she's very musical.

COLBY.

Thank you for the warning!

EGGERSON. So if you don't mind, I shall mention at once

That you are a musician.

COLBY.

I'll be on my guard.

EGGERSON. Your music will certainly be a great asset

With Lady Elizabeth. I envy you that.

I've always sung in our voluntary choir

And at the carol service. But I wish I was musical.

COLBY. I still don't feel very well prepared for meeting her.

[A loud knock. Enter B. KAGHAN]

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

KAGHAN. Enter B. Kaghan. Hello Colby!
And hello Eggers! I'm glad to find you here.
It's lucky for Colby.

EGGERSON. How so Mr. Kaghan?

KAGHAN. Because Lucasta's with me! The usual catastrophe.
She's come to pry some cash from the money-box.
Bankrupt again! So I thought I'd better bring her
And come upstairs ahead, to ease the shock for Colby.
But as you're here, Eggers, I can just relax.
I'm going to enjoy the game from the sidelines.

[Enter LUCASTA ANGEL]

LUCASTA. Eggy, I've lost my job!

EGGERSON. Again, Miss Angel?

LUCASTA. Yes, again! And serve them right!

EGGERSON. You have been, I presume, persistently unpunctual.

LUCASTA. You're wrong, Eggy. It's rank injustice.

Two months I'd gone on filing those papers
Which no one ever wanted — at least, not till yesterday.
Then, just by bad luck, the boss did want a letter
And I couldn't find it. And then he got suspicious
And asked for things I'm sure he didn't want —
Just to make trouble! And I couldn't find one of them.
But they're all filed somewhere, I'm sure, so why bother?
But who's this, Eggy? Is it Colby Simpkins?
Introduce him, one or the other of you.

EGGERSON. Mr. Simpkins, Miss Angel. As you know, Miss Angel,
Mr. Simpkins has taken over my duties.

LUCASTA. And does he know that I'm one of his duties?
Have you prepared him for taking *me* over?
Did you know that, Colby? I'm Lucasta.
It's only Eggy calls me Miss Angel,
Just to annoy me. Don't you agree
That Lucasta suits me better?

COLBY. I'm sure they both suit you.

LUCASTA. Snubbed again! I suppose I asked for it.
That's what comes of being cursed with a name like Angel.
I'm thinking of changing it. But, Colby,
Do you know that I'm one of your responsibilities?

COLBY. No, I'm afraid I didn't know that.

EGGERSON. You mustn't give way to her, Mr. Simpkins.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

I never do. I always say
That if you give Miss Angel an inch
She'll take an ell.

LUCASTA. L. for Lucasta.
Go on, Eggy. Don't mind him, Colby.
Colby, are you married?

COLBY. No, I'm not married.

LUCASTA. Then I don't mind being seen with you in public.
You may take me out to dinner. A working girl like me
Is often very hungry — living on a pittance —
Cooking a sausage on a gas ring . . .

EGGERSON. You mustn't believe a word she says.

LUCASTA. Mr. Simpkins is going to believe all I say,
Mr. Eggerston. And I know he'll be nice to me
When you're out of the way. Why don't you let him speak?
Eggy's really quite human, Colby.
It's only that he's terrified of Mrs. Eggerston;
That's why he's never asked me out to lunch.

EGGERSON. We will leave Mrs. Eggerston out of this, Miss Angel.

LUCASTA. That's what he always says, Colby,
When I mention Mrs. Eggerston. He never fails to rise.
B. ! What have you told Colby about me?

KAGHAN. It's no use telling anybody about you:
Nobody'd ever believe in your existence
Until they met you. Colby's still reeling.
It's going to be my responsibility,
As your fiancé, to protect Colby from you.
But first, let's cope with the financial crisis.

LUCASTA. Yes, Eggy, will you break the sad news to Claude?
Meanwhile, you'll have to raid the till for me. I'm starving.

KAGHAN. I've just given her lunch. The problem with Lucasta
Is how to keep her fed between meals.

LUCASTA. B., you're a beast. I've a very small appetite.
But the point is, that I'm penniless.

KAGHAN. She's had a week's salary in lieu of notice.

LUCASTA. B., remember you're only my fiancé on approval.
Can I have some money, Eggy?

EGGERSON. I'm no longer in charge,
And that duty has *not* devolved on Mr. Simpkins:
Sir Claude intends to deal with these matters himself.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

You will have to ask Sir Claude. But I'll speak to him
When I return from Northolt.

LUCASTA. You're going to meet Lizzie?

EGGERSON. I am meeting Lady Elizabeth at Northolt.

LUCASTA. Well, I don't propose to be on the scene when *she*
comes.

KAGHAN. And I don't propose to leave you with Colby.
He's had enough for one day. Take my advice, Colby.
Never allow Lucasta the slightest advantage
Or she'll exploit it. You have to be tough with her;
She's hard as nails. Now I'll take her off your hands.
I'll show you how it's done. Come along, Lucasta,
I'm going to make a day of it, and take you out to tea.

LUCASTA. I'm dying for my tea. The strain of this crisis
Has been too much for me. Another time, Colby.
I'll ring you up, and let you take me out to lunch.

[Exit LUCASTA]

KAGHAN. Take it easy, Colby. You'll get used to her.

[Exit KAGHAN]

COLBY. Egg . . . Mr. Eggerston!

EGGERSON. Yes, Mr. Simpkins?

COLBY. You seem to me sane. And I think I am.

EGGERSON. I have no doubt on either point, none at all.

COLBY. And B. Kaghan has always seemed to me sane.

EGGERSON. I should call him the very picture of sanity.

COLBY. But you never warned me about Miss Angel.
What about *her*?

EGGERSON. Oh, Miss Angel.

She's rather flighty. But she has a good heart.

COLBY. But does she address Sir Claude Mulhammer
As Claude? To his face?

EGGERSON. She does indeed.

COLBY. And does she call Lady Elizabeth *Lizzie*?

EGGERSON. Well, not in her presence. Not when I've been there.
No, I don't think she would. But she does call her Lizzie,
Sometimes, to Sir Claude. And do you know —
I think it amuses him.

COLBY. Well, perhaps I'll be amused.
But it did make my head spin — all those first names
The first time I met her. I'm not used to it.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

EGGERSON. You'll soon get used to it. You'll be calling me Eggers
Before you know it!

COLBY. I shouldn't wonder.

I nearly did, a moment ago.

Then I'd have been certain I'd lost my reason:

Her influence is perfectly frightening.

But tell me about Lu . . . Miss Angel:

What's her connection with this household?

EGGERSON. Well. A kind of fiduciary relationship.

No, I don't think that's quite the right term.

She's no money of her own, as you may have gathered;

But I think her father was a friend of Sir Claude's,

And he's made himself responsible for her.

In any case, he's behaved like a father —

A very generous man, is Sir Claude.

To tell the truth, she's something of a thorn in his flesh,

Always losing her jobs, because she won't stick to them.

He gives her an allowance — very adequate indeed,

Though she's always in debt. But you needn't worry

About her, Mr. Simpkins. She'll marry Mr. Kaghan

In the end. He's a man who gets his own way,

And I think he can manage her. If anyone can.

COLBY. But is she likely to be a nuisance?

EGGERSON. Not unless you give her encouragement.

I have never encouraged her.

COLBY. But you have Mrs. Eggerston.

EGGERSON. Yes, she's a great protection. And I have my garden

To protect me against Mrs. E. That's my joke.

COLBY. Well, I've never met anyone like Miss Angel.

EGGERSON. You'll get used to her, Mr. Simpkins.

Time works wonders, that's what I always say.

But I don't expect you'll have to see much of her:

That responsibility's not on your shoulders.

Lady Elizabeth, now, that's different.

COLBY. At least, I don't suppose Lady Elizabeth

Can be quite so unusual as Miss Angel.

EGGERSON. O yes, Mr. Simpkins, much more unusual.

COLBY. Oh!

EGGERSON. Well, as I told you, she really is a lady,

Rather a *grande dame*, as the French say.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

That's what Sir Claude admires about her.
He said to me once, in a moment of confidence —
He'd just come back from a public luncheon —
'Eggerson', he said, 'I wanted a lady,
And I'm perfectly satisfied with the bargain.'
Of course it's true that her family connections
Have sometimes been useful. But he didn't think of that:
He's not petty-minded — though nothing escapes him.
And such a generous heart! He's rather a Socialist.
I'm a staunch Conservative, myself.

COLBY. But is Lady Elizabeth very unusual

In any other way, besides being a lady?

EGGERSON. Why, yes, indeed, I must admit she is.

Most of her oddities are perfectly harmless.

You'll soon get used to them. That's what Sir Claude said:

'Humour her, Eggerson,' he said, 'humour her.'

But she has one trait that I think I did touch on:

She's very absent-minded.

COLBY.

I hope you don't mean,

She has lapses of memory?

EGGERSON.

I didn't mean that.

No. She hasn't very much memory to lose,

Though she sometimes remembers when you least expect it.

But she does forget things. And she likes to travel,

Mostly for her health. And when she's abroad

She is apt to buy a house. And then goes away

And forgets all about it. That can be complicated

And very costly. I've had some rare adventures!

I remember long ago, saying to Mrs. E.,

When we'd bought our house in Joshua Park

(On a mortgage, of course) 'now we've settled down

All the travel I want is up to the City

And back to Joshua Park in the evening,

And once a year our holiday at Dawlish'.

And to think that was only the beginning of my travels!

It's been a very unusual privilege

To see as much of Europe as I have,

Getting Lady Elizabeth out of her difficulties.

COLBY. Perhaps she won't even arrive by this plane.

EGGERSON. Oh, that could happen. She sometimes gets lost,

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Or loses her ticket, or even her passport.
But let's not be crossing any bridges
Until we come to them. That's what *I* always say.
And I'm sure you'll like her. She's *such* a lady!
And what's more, she has a good heart.

COLBY. Everybody seems to be kind-hearted.

But there's one thing I do believe, Mr. Eggerson:
That *you* have a kind heart. And I'm convinced
That you always contrive to think the best of everyone.

EGGERSON. You'll come to find that I'm right, I assure you.

[Enter SIR CLAUDE]

SIR CLAUDE. Hello! Still here? It's time you were off.

EGGERSON. I'm just going. There's plenty of time.

[Looks at his watch]

I'll arrive at the airport with minutes to spare,
And besides, there's the Customs. That'll take her a time,
From my experience.

LADY ELIZABETH MULHAMMER's *voice off*. * Just open that case, I
want something out of it.

Unwrap that — It's a bottle of medicine.
Now, Parkman, will you give it to the driver?
He tells me that he suffers from chronic catarrh.

SIR CLAUDE. Hello! What's that?

[Opens door on to landing and listens]

She's here, Eggerson! That's her voice.

Where is she? Oh, she's gone out again.

[Goes to the window and looks down on the street]

She's having a conversation with the cabman.

What can they be talking about? She's coming in!

LADY ELIZABETH MULHAMMER's *voice off*. * No, Gertrude, I haven't
had any lunch,

And I don't want it now. Just bring me some tea.

Nothing with it. No, I forgot:

You haven't learned yet how to make tea properly.

A cup of black coffee. Is Sir Claude at home?

I'll speak to him first.

SIR CLAUDE. Good heavens, Eggerson, what *can* have happened?

EGGERSON. It's perfectly amazing. Let *me* go down to meet her.

* *Lady Elizabeth's words off stage are not intended to be heard distinctly by an audience in the theatre.*

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

SIR CLAUDE. Where ought we to be? What ought we to be doing?

EGGERSON [*at the open door*]. She's speaking to the parlourmaid. She's coming up.

SIR CLAUDE. Colby, sit at the desk, and pick up some papers.

We must look as if we'd been engaged in business.

[*Enter LADY ELIZABETH MULHAMMER*]

EGGERSON & SIR CLAUDE [*simultaneously*]. Lady Elizabeth!
Elizabeth!

SIR CLAUDE. What on earth has happened?

EGGERSON. Lady Elizabeth! This is most surprising.

LADY ELIZABETH. What's surprising, Eggerston? I've arrived, that's all.

EGGERSON. I was just starting for Northolt to meet you.

LADY ELIZABETH. That was very thoughtful of you, Eggerston,
But quite unnecessary. And besides,
I didn't come by air. I arrived at Victoria.

SIR CLAUDE. Do you mean to say that you changed your ticket?

EGGERSON. Yes, how did you manage to change your ticket?

LADY ELIZABETH. I went to the agency and got them to change it.
I can't understand why you're both so surprised.

You know I'm a very experienced traveller.

SIR CLAUDE. Oh yes, of course we know that, Elizabeth.
But why did you change your plans?

LADY ELIZABETH. Because of Mildred Deverell.
She's been having the treatment with me,
And she can't go by air — she says it makes her sea-sick;
So we took the night train, and did the Channel crossing.
But who is this young man? His face is familiar.

SIR CLAUDE. This young man is Eggerston's successor.

You know that Eggerston's been meaning to retire . . .

EGGERSON. Under medical orders, Lady Elizabeth:
The doctor made it very imperative . . .

SIR CLAUDE. Mr. Simpkins had very strong recommendations . . .

EGGERSON. And at the same time, he had another tempting offer:
So we had to make a quick decision.

SIR CLAUDE. I didn't want to bother you, during your treatment . . .

EGGERSON. And Mr. Simpkins is much more highly qualified
Than I am, to be a confidential clerk.
Besides, he's very musical.

LADY ELIZABETH. Musical?
Isn't this the young man I interviewed

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

And recommended to Sir Claude? Of course it is.
I remember saying: 'He has a good aura.'
I remember people's auras almost better than their faces.
What did you say his name was?

SIR CLAUDE. Colby Simpkins.

LADY ELIZABETH [*counting on her fingers*]. Thirteen letters. That's very auspicious —

Contrary to what most people think.
You should be artistic. But you look rather frail.
I must give you lessons in the art of health.
Where is your home, Mr. Colby?

COLBY. Simpkins.

EGGERSON. Mr. Colby Simpkins.

LADY ELIZABETH. I prefer Colby.

Where are you living?

SIR CLAUDE. His home's outside London.

But I want to have him closer at hand —
You know what a bother it's been for Eggerson —
So I'm having the flat in the mews done over.

LADY ELIZABETH. But all in the wrong colours, I'm sure. My husband

Does not understand the importance of colour
For our spiritual life, Mr. Colby.
Neither, I regret to say, does Eggerson.
What colour have you chosen, between you?

SIR CLAUDE. I thought a primrose yellow would be cheerful.

LADY ELIZABETH. Just what I expected. A primrose yellow

Would be absolutely baneful to Mr. Colby.
He needs a light mauve. I shall see about *that*.
But not today. I shall go and rest now.
In a sleeping-car it is quite impossible
To get one's quiet hour. A quiet hour a day
Is most essential, Dr. Rebmann says.

SIR CLAUDE. Rebmann? I thought it was a Dr. Leroux.

LADY ELIZABETH. Dr. Leroux is in Lausanne.

I have been in Zurich, under Dr. Rebmann.

SIR CLAUDE. But you were going out to Dr. Leroux

In Lausanne. What made you go to Zurich?

LADY ELIZABETH. Why, I'd no sooner got to Lausanne

Than whom should I meet but Mildred Deverell.

She was going on to Zurich. So she said: 'Come to Zurich!

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

There's a wonderful doctor who teaches mind control.'

So on I went to Zurich.

SIR CLAUDE. So on you went to Zurich.

But I thought that the doctor in Lausanne taught mind control?

LADY ELIZABETH. No, Claude, he only teaches *thought* control.

Mind control is a different matter:

It's more advanced. But I wrote you all about it.

SIR CLAUDE. It's true, you did send me postcards from Zurich;

But you know that I can't decipher your writing.

I like to have the cards, just to know where you are

By reading the postmark.

LADY ELIZABETH. But Claude, I'm glad to find

That you've taken my advice.

SIR CLAUDE. Your advice? About what?

LADY ELIZABETH. To engage Mr. Colby. I really am distressed!

This is not the first sign that I've noticed

Of your memory failing. I must persuade you

To have a course of treatment with Dr. Rebmann —

No, at your stage, I think, with Dr. Leroux.

Don't you remember, I said before I left:

'Trust my guidance for once, and engage that young man?'

Well, that was Mr. Colby.

SIR CLAUDE. Oh, I see.

Yes, now I am beginning to remember.

I must have acted on your guidance.

LADY ELIZABETH. I must explain to you, Mr. Colby,

That I am to share you with my husband.

You shall have tea with me tomorrow,

And then I shall tell you about my committees.

I must go and rest now.

SIR CLAUDE. Yes, you go and rest.

I'm in the middle of some business with Mr. . . .

LADY ELIZABETH.

Colby!

[Exit LADY ELIZABETH]

SIR CLAUDE. She actually went and changed her own ticket.

It's something unheard of.

EGGERSON. Amazing, isn't it!

SIR CLAUDE. If this is what the doctor in Zurich has done for her,

I give him full marks. Well, Eggerston,

I seem to have brought you up to London for nothing.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

EGGERSON. Oh, not for nothing! I wouldn't have missed it.

And besides, as I told you, I've done some shopping.

But I'd better be off now. Mr. Simpkins —

If anything *should* turn up unexpected

And you find yourself non-plussed, you must get me on the phone.

If I'm not in the house, I'll be out in the garden.

And I'll slip up to town any day, if you want me.

In fact, Mrs. E. said: 'I wish he'd ring us up!

I'm sure he has a very cultivated voice.'

COLBY. Thank you very much, I will. It's reassuring

To know that I have you always at my back

If I get into trouble. But I hope

That I shan't have to call upon you often.

EGGERSON. Oh, and I forgot . . . Mrs. E. keeps saying:

'Why don't you ask him out to dinner one Sunday?'

But I say: 'We couldn't ask him to come

All the way to Joshua Park, at this time of year!'

I said: 'Let's think about it in the Spring

When the garden will really be a treat to look at.'

Well, I'll be going.

SIR CLAUDE. Goodbye, and thank you, Eggerston.

EGGERSON. Good day, Sir Claude. Good day, Mr. Simpkins.

[Exit EGGERSON]

SIR CLAUDE. Well, Colby! I've been calling you Mr. Simpkins

In public, till now, as a matter of prudence.

As we arranged. But after two months —

And as my wife insists upon your being Mr. Colby —

I shall begin to call you Colby with everyone.

COLBY. I'm sure that will make it easier for both of us.

SIR CLAUDE. Her sudden arrival was very disconcerting:

As you gather, such a thing never happened before.

So the meeting didn't go quite the way I'd intended;

And yet I believe that it's all for the best.

It went off very well. It's very obvious

That she took to you at once.

COLBY. Did she really think

That she had seen me before?

SIR CLAUDE. Impossible to tell.

The point is that she's taken a fancy to you

And so she lays claim to you. That's very satisfactory.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

She's taken it for granted that you should have the flat —
By tomorrow she'll be sure it was she who proposed it.
So I feel pretty confident that, before long,
We can put matters onto a permanent basis.

COLBY. I must confess, that up to this point
I haven't been able to feel very settled.
And what you've had in mind still seems to me
Like building my life upon a deception.
Do you really believe that Lady Elizabeth
Can ever accept me as if I was her son?

SIR CLAUDE. As if you were her son? If she comes to think of you
As the kind of man that her son would have been —
And I believe she will: though I'm perfectly convinced
That *her* son would have been a different type of person —
Then you *will* become her son, in her eyes. She's like that.
Why, it wouldn't surprise me if she came to believe
That you really are her son, instead of being mine.
She has always lived in a world of make-believe,
And the best one can do is to guide her delusions
In the right direction.

COLBY. It doesn't seem quite honest.
If we all have to live in a world of make-believe,
Is that good for us? Or a kindness to her?

SIR CLAUDE. If you haven't the strength to impose your own terms
Upon life, you must accept the terms it offers you.
But tell me first — I've a reason for asking —
How do you like your work? You don't find it uncongenial?
I'm not changing the subject: I'm coming back to it.
You know I've deliberately left you alone,
And so far we've discussed only current business,
Thinking that you might find it easier
To start by a rather formal relationship
In adapting yourself to a new situation.

COLBY. I'm very grateful to you, for that:
It is indeed a new and strange situation,
And nothing about it is real to me yet.

SIR CLAUDE. But now I want it to be different. It's odd, Colby.
I didn't realise, till you started with me here,
That we hardly know each other at all.

COLBY. I suppose there hasn't been the opportunity.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

SIR CLAUDE. When you were a child, you belonged to your aunt,
Or so she made me feel. I never saw you alone.
And then when I sent you both over to Canada
In the war — that was perhaps a mistake,
Though it seemed to have such obvious advantages
That I had no doubts at the time — that's five years;
And then your school, and your military service,
And then your absorption in your music . . .

COLBY. You started by asking me how I found this work.

SIR CLAUDE. Yes, how do you find it?

COLBY. In a way, exhilarating.

To find there is something that I can do
So remote from my previous interests.
It gives me, in a way, a kind of self-confidence
I've never had before. Yet at the same time
It's rather disturbing. I don't mean the work:
I mean, about myself. As if I was becoming
A different person. Just as, I suppose,
If you learn to speak a foreign language fluently,
So that you can think in it — you feel yourself to be
Rather a different person when you're talking it.
I'm not at all sure that I like the other person
That I feel myself becoming — though he fascinates me.
And yet from time to time, when I least expect it,
When my mind is cleared and empty, walking in the street
Or waking in the night, then the former person,
The person I used to be, returns to take possession:
And I am again the disappointed organist,
And for a moment the thing I cannot do,
The art that I could never excel in,
Seems the one thing worth doing, the one thing
That I want to do. I have to fight that person.

SIR CLAUDE. I understand what you are saying
Much better than you think. It's my own experience
That you are repeating.

COLBY. Your own experience?

SIR CLAUDE. Yes, I did not want to be a financier.

COLBY. What did you want to do?

SIR CLAUDE. I wanted to be a potter.

COLBY. A potter!

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

SIR CLAUDE. A potter. When I was a boy
I loved to shape things. I loved form and colour
And I loved the material that the potter handles.
Most people think that a sculptor or a painter
Is something more excellent to be than a potter.
Most people think of china or porcelain
As merely for use, or for decoration —
In either case, an inferior art.
For me, they are neither 'use' nor 'decoration' —
That is, decoration as a background for living;
For me, they are life itself. To be among such things,
If it is an escape, is escape into living,
Escape from a sordid world to a pure one.
Sculpture and painting — I have some good things —
But they haven't this . . . remoteness I have always longed for.
I want a world where the form is the reality,
Of which the substantial is only a shadow.
It's strange. I have never talked of this to anyone.
Never until now. Do you feel at all like that
When you are alone with your music?

COLBY. Just the same.
All the time you've been speaking, I've been translating
Into terms of music. But may I ask,
With this passion for . . . ceramics, how did it happen
That you never made it your profession?

SIR CLAUDE. Family pressure, in the first place.
My father — your grandfather — built up this business
Starting from nothing. It was *his* passion.
He loved it with the same devotion
That I gave to clay, and what could be done with it —
What I hoped I could do with it. I thought I despised him
When I was young. And yet I was in awe of him.
I was wrong, in both. I loathed this occupation
Until I began to feel my power in it.
The life changed me, as it is changing you:
It begins as a kind of make-believe
And the make-believing makes it real.
That's not the whole story. My father knew I hated it:
That was a grief to him. He knew, I am sure,
That I cherished for a long time a secret reproach:

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

But after his death, and then it was too late,
I knew that he was right. And all my life
I have been atoning. To a dead father,
Who had always been right. I never understood him.
I was too young. And when I was mature enough
To understand him, he was not there.

COLBY. You've still not explained why you came to think
That your father had been right.

SIR CLAUDE. Because I came to see
That I should never have become a first-rate potter.
I didn't have it in me. It's strange, isn't it,
That a man should have a consuming passion
To do something for which he lacks the capacity?
Could a man be said to have a vocation
To be a second-rate potter? To be, at best,
A competent copier, possessed by the craving
To create, when one is wholly uncreative?
I don't think so. For I came to see
That I had always known, at the secret moments,
That I didn't have it in me. There are occasions
When I am transported — a different person,
Transfigured in the vision of some marvellous creation,
And I feel what the man must have felt when he made it.
But nothing *I* made ever gave me that contentment —
That state of utter exhaustion and peace
Which comes in dying to give something life . . .
I intend that you shall have a good piano. The best.
And when you are alone at your piano, in the evening,
I believe you will go through the private door
Into the real world, as I do, sometimes.

COLBY. Indeed, I have felt, while you've been talking,
That it's my own feelings you have expressed,
Although the medium is different. I know
I should never have become a great organist,
As I aspired to be. I'm not an executant;
I'm only a shadow of the great composers.
Always, when I play to myself,
I hear the music I should like to have written,
As the composer heard it when it came to him;
But when I played before other people

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

I was always conscious that what *they* heard
Was not what I hear when I play to myself.
What I hear is a great musician's music,
What they hear is an inferior rendering.
So I've given up trying to play to other people:
I am only happy when I play to myself.

SIR CLAUDE. You shall play to yourself. And as for me,
I keep my pieces in a private room.
It isn't that I don't want anyone to see them!
But when I am alone, and look at one thing long enough,
I sometimes have that sense of identification
With the maker, of which I spoke — an agonising ecstasy
Which makes life bearable. It's all I have.
I suppose it takes the place of religion:
Just as my wife's investigations
Into what she calls the life of the spirit
Are a kind of substitute for religion.
I dare say truly religious people —
I've never known any — can find some unity.
Then there are also the men of genius.
There are others, it seems to me, who have at best to live
In two worlds — each a kind of make-believe.
That's you and me. Some day, perhaps,
I will show you my collection.

COLBY. Thank you.

SIR CLAUDE. And perhaps, some time, you will let me hear you play.
I shan't mention it again. I'll wait until you ask me.
Do you understand now what I meant when I spoke
Of accepting the terms life imposes upon you
Even to the point of accepting . . . make-believe?

COLBY. I think I do. At least, I understand *you* better
In learning to understand the conditions
Which life has imposed upon you. But . . . something in me
Rebels against accepting such conditions.
It would be so much simpler if you *weren't* my father!
I was struck by what you said, a little while ago,
When you spoke of never having understood your father
Until it was too late. And you spoke of atonement.
Even your failure to understand him,
Of which you spoke — that was a relationship

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Of father and son. It must often happen.
And the reconciliation, after his death,
That perfects the relation. You have always been his son
And he is still your father. I only wish
That I had something to atone for!
There's something lacking, between you and me,
That you had, and have, and always will have, with your
father.

I begin to see how I have always thought of you —
As a kind of protector, a generous provider:
Rather as a patron than a father —
The father who was missing in the years of childhood.
Those years have gone forever. The empty years.
Oh, I'm terribly sorry to be saying this;
But it goes to explain what I said just now
About rebelling against the terms
That life has imposed.

SIR CLAUDE. It's my own fault.
I was always anxious to avoid the mistakes
My father made with me. And yet I seem
To have made a greater mistake than he did.

COLBY. I know that I'm hurting you and I know
That I hate myself for hurting you.

SIR CLAUDE. You mustn't think of that.

COLBY. I'm very grateful for all you've done for me;
And I want to do my best to justify your kindness
By the work I do.

SIR CLAUDE. As my confidential clerk.

COLBY. I'm really interested by the work I'm doing
And eager for more. I don't want my position
To be, in any way, a make-believe.

SIR CLAUDE. It shan't be. Meanwhile, we must simply wait to
learn

What new conditions life will impose on us.
Just when we think we have settled our account
Life presents a new one, more difficult to pay.
— I shall go now, and sit for a while with my china.

COLBY. Excuse me, but I must remind you:
You have that meeting in the City
Tomorrow morning. You asked me to prepare

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Some figures for you. I've got them here.

SIR CLAUDE. Much depends on my wife. Be patient with her, Colby.

— Oh yes, that meeting. We must run through the figures.

CURTAIN

Act Two

The flat in the mews a few weeks later. COLBY is seated at the piano; LUCASTA in an armchair. The concluding bars of a piece of music are heard as the curtain rises.

LUCASTA. I think you play awfully well, Colby —

Not that *my* opinion counts for anything:

You know that. But I'd like to learn about music.

I wish you would teach me how to appreciate it.

COLBY. I don't think that you'll need much teaching;

Not at this stage, anyway. All you need at first

Is to hear more music. And to find out what you like.

When you know what you like, and begin to know it well,

Then you will want to learn about its structure

And the various forms, and the different ways of playing it.

LUCASTA. But suppose I only like the wrong things?

COLBY. No, I'm sure you'll prefer the right things, when you hear them.

I've given you a test. Several of the pieces

That I've just played you were very second-rate,

And you didn't like them. You liked the right ones.

LUCASTA. Colby, I didn't know you were so artful!

So the things I liked were the right ones to like?

Still, I'm awfully ignorant. Can you believe

That I've never been to a concert in my life?

I only go to shows when somebody invites me,

And no one has ever asked me to a concert.

I've been to the Opera, of course, several times,

But I'm afraid I never really listened to the music:

I just enjoyed going — to see the other people,

And to be seen there! And because you feel out of it

If you never go to the Opera, in the season.

Though I've always felt out of it. And can you realise

That nobody has ever played to me before?

COLBY. And this is the first time I've played to anyone . . .

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

LUCASTA. Don't be such a fraud. You know you told me
The piano was only delivered this week
And you had it tuned yesterday. Still, I'm flattered
To be your first visitor in this flat
And to be the first to hear you play *this* piano.

COLBY. That's not what I meant. I mean that I've not played
To anyone, since I came to the conclusion
That I should never become a musician.

LUCASTA. Did you find it a strain, then, playing to me?

COLBY. As a matter of fact, I think I played better.

I can't bring myself to play to other people,
And when I'm alone I can't forget
That it's only myself to whom I'm playing.
But with you, it was neither solitude nor . . . people.

LUCASTA. I'm glad I'm not people. Will you play to me again
And teach me about music?

COLBY. Yes, of course I will.

But I'm sure that when you learn about music —
And that won't take you long — and hear good performers,
You'll very quickly realise how bad my playing is.

LUCASTA. Really, Colby, you do make difficulties!

But what about taking me to a concert?

COLBY. Only the other day, I invited you . . .

LUCASTA. To go to see that American Musical!

COLBY. Well, I'd heard you say you wanted to see it.

LUCASTA. But not with you!

COLBY. You made that very clear.

But why not with me?

LUCASTA. Because you don't like them —

American Musicals. Do you think it's any compliment
To invite a woman to something she would like
When she knows *you* wouldn't like it? That's not a compliment:
That's just being . . . patronising. But if you invite me
To something you like — that *is* a compliment.
It shows you want to educate me.

COLBY. But I didn't know

That you wanted to be educated.

LUCASTA. Neither did I.

But I wanted you to want to educate me;
And now I'm beginning to believe that I want it.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

COLBY. Well, I'm going to invite you to the next concert . . .

LUCASTA. The next that you want to go to *yourself*.

COLBY. And perhaps you'll let me tell you beforehand
About the programme — or the things I want to hear.
I'll play you the themes, so you'll recognise them.
Better still, I'll play you the gramophone records.

LUCASTA. I'd rather you played me bits yourself, and explained them.
We'll begin my education at once.

COLBY. I suspect that it's you who are educating *me*.

LUCASTA. Colby, you really are full of surprises!
I've never met a man so ignorant as you
Yet knowing so much that one wouldn't suspect.
Perhaps that's why I like you.

COLBY. That's not quite the reason.

LUCASTA. Oh, so you believe that I like you?
I didn't know that you were so conceited.

COLBY. No, it's not conceit — the reason that I'm thinking of.
It's something quite simple.

LUCASTA. Then I wish you'd tell me.
Because *I* don't know.

COLBY. The first time we met
You were trying very hard to give a false impression.
And then you came to see that you hadn't succeeded.

LUCASTA. Oh, so I was trying to give a false impression?
What sort of impression was I trying to give?

COLBY. That doesn't really matter. But, for some reason,
You thought I'd get a false impression anyway.
You preferred it to be one of your own creation
Rather than wait to see what happened.
I hope you don't mind: I know it sounds impertinent.

LUCASTA. Well, there's one thing you haven't learnt yet,
And that is, to know when you're paying a compliment.
That was a compliment. And a very clever one.

COLBY. I admit that at first I was very bewildered
By you . . . and B.

LUCASTA. Oh, by me . . . and B.

COLBY. Only afterwards,
When I had seen you a number of times,
I decided that was only your kind of self-defence.

LUCASTA. What made you think it was self-defence?

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

COLBY. Because you couldn't wait to see what happened.
You're afraid of what would happen if you left things to themselves.
You jump — because you're afraid of being pushed.
I think that you're brave — and I think that you're frightened.
Perhaps you've been very badly hurt, at some time.
Or at least, there may have been something in your life
To rob you of any sense of security.

LUCASTA. And I'm sure you have *that* — the sense of security.

COLBY. No, I haven't either.

LUCASTA. There, I don't believe you.

What did I think till now? Oh, it's strange, isn't it,
That as one gets to know a person better
One finds them in some ways very like oneself,
In unexpected ways. And then you begin
To discover differences inside the likeness.
You may *feel* insecure, in some ways —
But your insecurity is nothing like mine.

COLBY. In what way is it different?

LUCASTA. It's hard to explain.

Perhaps it's something that your music stands for.
There's one thing I know. When you first told me
What a disaster it was in your life
When you found that you'd never be a good musician —
Of course, *I* don't know whether you were right.
For all I can tell, you may have been mistaken,
And perhaps you could be a very great musician:
But that's not the point. You'd convinced yourself;
And you felt that your life had all collapsed
And that you must learn to do something different.
And so you applied for Eggerson's position,
And made up your mind to go into business
And be someone like Claude . . . or B. I was sorry,
Very sorry for you. I admired your courage
In facing facts — or the facts as you saw them.
And yet, all the time, I found I *envied* you
And I didn't know why! And now I think I know.
It's awful for a man to have to give up,
A career that he's set his heart on, I'm sure:
But it's only the outer world that you've lost:
You've still got your inner world — a world that's more real.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

That's why you're different from the rest of us:
You have your secret garden; to which you can retire
And lock the gate behind you.

COLBY. And lock the gate behind me?
Are you sure that you haven't your own secret garden
Somewhere, if you could find it?

LUCASTA. If I could find it!
No, my only garden is . . . a dirty public square
In a shabby part of London — like the one where I lived
For a time, with my mother. I've no garden.
I hardly feel that I'm even a person:
Nothing but a bit of living matter
Floating on the surface of the Regent's Canal.
Floating, that's it.

COLBY. You're very much a person.
I'm sure that there is a garden somewhere for you —
For anyone who wants one as much as you do.

LUCASTA. And *your* garden is a garden
Where you hear a music that no one else could hear,
And the flowers have a scent that no one else could smell.

COLBY. You may be right, up to a point.
And yet, you know, it's not quite real to me —
Although it's as real to me as . . . this world.
But that's just the trouble. They seem so unrelated.
I turn the key, and walk through the gate,
And there I am . . . alone, in my 'garden'.
Alone, that's the thing. That's why it's not real.
You know, I think that Eggerson's garden
Is more real than mine.

LUCASTA. Eggerson's garden?
What makes you think of Eggerson — of all people?

COLBY. Well, he retires to his garden — literally,
And also in the same sense that I retire to mine.
But he doesn't feel alone there. And when he comes out
He has marrows, or beetroot, or peas . . . for Mrs. Eggerson.

LUCASTA. Are you laughing at me?

COLBY. I'm being very serious.
What I mean is, my garden's no less unreal to me
Than the world outside it. If you have two lives
Which have nothing whatever to do with each other —

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Well, they're both unreal. But for Eggerson

His garden is a part of one single world.

LUCASTA. But what do you want?

COLBY. Not to be alone there.

If I were religious, God would walk in my garden

And that would make the world outside it real

And acceptable, I think.

LUCASTA. You sound awfully religious.

Is there no other way of making it real to you?

COLBY. It's simply the fact of being alone there

That makes it unreal.

LUCASTA. Can no one else enter?

COLBY. It can't be done by issuing invitations:

They would just have to come. And I should not see them coming.

I should not hear the opening of the gate.

They would simply . . . be there suddenly,

Unexpectedly. Walking down an alley

I should become aware of someone walking with me.

That's the only way I can think of putting it.

LUCASTA. How afraid one is of . . . being hurt!

COLBY. It's not the hurting that one would mind

But the sense of desolation afterwards.

LUCASTA. I know what you mean. Then the flowers would fade

And the music would stop. And the walls would be broken.

And you would find yourself in a devastated area —

A bomb-site . . . willow-herb . . . a dirty public square.

But I can't imagine that happening to you.

You seem so secure, to me. Not only in your music —

That's just its expression. You don't seem to me

To need anybody.

COLBY. That's quite untrue.

LUCASTA. But you've something else, that I haven't got:

Something of which the music is a . . . symbol.

I really would like to understand music,

Not in order to be able to talk about it,

But . . . partly, to enjoy it . . . and because of what it stands for.

You know, I'm a little jealous of your music!

When I see it as a means of contact with a world

More real than any *I've* ever lived in.

And I'd like to understand *you*.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

COLBY. I believe you do already,
Better than . . . other people. And I want to understand *you*.
Does one ever come to understand anyone?

LUCASTA. I think you're being very discouraging:
Are you doing it deliberately?

COLBY. That's not what I meant.
I meant, there's no end to understanding a person.
All one can do is to understand them better,
To keep up with them; so that as the other changes
You can understand the change as soon as it happens,
Though you couldn't have predicted it.

LUCASTA. I think I'm changing.
I've changed quite a lot in the last two hours.

COLBY. And I think I'm changing too. But perhaps what we call
change . . .

LUCASTA. Is understanding better what one really is.
And the reason why that comes about, perhaps . . .

COLBY. Is, beginning to understand another person.

LUCASTA. Oh Colby, now that we begin to understand,
I'd like you to know a little more about me.
You must have wondered.

COLBY. Must have wondered?
No, I haven't wondered. It's all a strange world
To me, you know, in which I find myself.
But if you mean, wondered about your . . . background:
No. I've been curious to know what you *are*,
But not who you are, in the ordinary sense.
Is that what you mean? I've just accepted you.

LUCASTA. Oh, that's so wonderful, to be accepted!
No one has ever 'just accepted' me before.
Of course the facts don't matter, in a sense.
But now we've got to this point — you might as well know
them.

COLBY. I'd gladly tell you everything about myself;
But you know most of what there is to say
Already, either from what I've told you
Or from what I've told B.; or from Sir Claude.

LUCASTA. Claude hasn't told me anything about you;
He doesn't tell me much. And as for B. —
I'd much rather hear it from yourself.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

COLBY. There's only one thing I can't tell you.

At least, not yet. I'm not allowed to tell.

And that's about my parents.

LUCASTA. Oh, I see.

Well, I can't believe that matters.

But I can tell you all about *my* parents:

At least, I'm going to.

COLBY. Does that matter, either?

LUCASTA. In one way, it matters. A little while ago

You said, very cleverly, that when we first met

You saw I was trying to give a false impression.

I want to tell you now, why I tried to do that.

And it's always succeeded with people before:

I got into the habit of giving that impression.

That's where B. has been such a help to me —

He fosters the impression. He half believes in it.

But he knows all about me, and he knows

That what some men have thought about me wasn't true.

COLBY. What wasn't true?

LUCASTA. That I was Claude's mistress —

Or had been his mistress, palmed off on B.

COLBY. I never thought of such a thing!

LUCASTA. You never thought of such a thing!

There are not many men who wouldn't have thought it.

I don't know about B. He's very generous.

I don't think he'd have minded. But he's very clever too;

And he guessed the truth from the very first moment.

COLBY. But what is there to know?

LUCASTA. You'll laugh when I tell you:

I'm only Claude's daughter.

COLBY. His daughter!

LUCASTA. His daughter. Oh, it's a sordid story.

I hated my mother. I never could see

How Claude had ever liked her. Oh, that childhood —

Always living in seedy lodgings

And being turned out when the neighbours complained.

Oh of course Claude gave her money, a regular allowance;

But it wouldn't have mattered how much he'd given her:

It was always spent before the end of the quarter

On gin and betting, I should guess.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

And I knew how she supplemented her income
When I was sent out. I've been locked in a cupboard!
I was only eight years old
When she died of an 'accidental overdose'.
Then Claude took me over. That was lucky.
But I was old enough to remember . . . too much.

COLBY. You are Claude's daughter!

LUCASTA. Oh, there's no doubt of that.
I'm sure he wished there had been. He's been good to me
In his way. But I'm always a reminder to him
Of something he would prefer to forget.

[A pause]

But why don't you say something? Are you shocked?

COLBY. Shocked? No. Yes. You don't understand.

I want to explain. But I can't, just yet.

Oh, why did I ever come into this house!

Lucasta . . .

LUCASTA. I can see well enough you *are* shocked.
You ought to see your face! I'm disappointed.
I suppose that's all. I believe you're more shocked
Than if I'd told you I *was* Claude's mistress.
Claude has always been ashamed of me:
Now *you're* ashamed of me. I thought you'd understand.
Little you know what it's like to be a bastard
And wanted by nobody. I know why you're shocked:
Claude has just accepted me like a debit item
Always in his cash account. I don't like myself.
I don't like the person I've forced myself to be;
And I liked you because you didn't like that person either,
And I thought you'd come to see me as the real kind of person
That I want to be. That I know I am.
That was new to me. I suppose I was flattered.
And I thought, now, perhaps, if someone else sees me
As I really am, I might become myself.

COLBY. Oh Lucasta, I'm not shocked. Not by you,
Not by anything you think. It's to do with myself.

LUCASTA. Yourself, indeed! Your precious self!
Why don't you shut yourself up in that garden
Where you like to be alone with yourself?
Or perhaps you think it would be bad for your prospects

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Now that you're Claude's white-headed boy.
Perhaps he'll adopt you, and make you his heir
And you'll marry another Lady Elizabeth.
But in that event, Colby, you'll have to accept me
As your sister! Even if I am a guttersnipe . . .

COLBY. You mustn't use such words! You don't know how it's hurting.

LUCASTA. I could use words much stronger than that,

And I will, if I choose. Oh, I'm sorry:

I suppose it's my mother coming out in me.

You know, Colby, I'm truly disappointed.

I was sure, when I told you all I did,

That you wouldn't mind at all. That you might be sorry for me.

But now I don't want you to be sorry, thank you.

Why, I'd actually thought of telling you before,

And I postponed telling you, just for the fun of it:

I thought, when I tell him, it will be so wonderful

All in a moment. And now there's nothing,

Nothing at all. It's far worse than ever.

Just when you think you're on the point of release

From loneliness, then loneliness swoops down upon you;

When you think you're getting out, you're getting further in,

And you know at last that there's no escape.

Well, I'll be going.

COLBY. You mustn't go yet!

There's something else that I want to explain,

And now I'm going to. I'm breaking a promise. But . . .

LUCASTA. I don't believe there's anything to explain

That could explain anything away. I shall never

Never forget that look on your face

When I told you about Claude and my mother.

I may be a bastard, but I have some self-respect.

Well, there's always B. I think that now

I'm just beginning to appreciate B.

COLBY. Lucasta, wait!

[Enter B. KAGHAN]

KAGHAN. Enter B. Kaghan.

To see the new flat. And here's Lucasta.

I knew I should find she'd got in first!

Trust Kaghan's intuitions! I'm your guardian angel,

Colby, to protect you from Lucasta.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

LUCASTA. You're *my* guardian angel at the moment, B.

You're to take me out to dinner. And I'm dying for a drink.

KAGHAN. I told Colby, never learn to mix cocktails,

If you don't want women always dropping in on you.

And between a couple of man-eating tigers

Like you and Lizzie, he's got to have protection.

LUCASTA. Colby doesn't need your protection racket

So far as I'm concerned, B. And as for Lizzie,

You'd better not get in *her* way when she's hunting.

But all that matters now is, that I'm hungry,

And you've got to give me a very good dinner.

KAGHAN. You shall be fed. All in good time.

I've come to inspect the new bachelor quarters,

And to wish Colby luck. I've always been lucky,

And I always bring luck to other people.

COLBY. Will you have a glass of sherry?

KAGHAN.

Yes, I'll have a glass of sherry,

To drink success to the flat. Lucasta too:

Much better for you than cocktails, Lucasta.

LUCASTA. You know I don't like sherry.

KAGHAN.

You've got to drink it,

To Colby, and a happy bachelor life!

Which depends, of course, on preventing Lizzie

From always interfering. Be firm with her, Colby;

Assert your right to a little privacy.

Now's the moment for firmness. Don't let her cross the threshold.

LUCASTA. As if you weren't as afraid of her as anybody!

KAGHAN. Well, at least, I've always managed to escape her.

LUCASTA. Only because she's never wanted to pursue you.

KAGHAN. Yes, I made a bad impression at the start:

I saw that it was necessary. I'm afraid Colby

Has made a good impression; which he'll have to live down.

— I must say, I like the way you've had the place done up.

COLBY. It was Lady Elizabeth chose the decorations.

KAGHAN. Then I'm not sure I like them. You must change the colours.

It's all a bit too dim. You need something brighter.

But otherwise, it looks pretty comfortable.

If I was as snug as Colby is, Lucasta,

I'd never have thought of changing my condition.

LUCASTA. You're always free to think again.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

KAGHAN. Marriage is a gamble. But I'm a born gambler
And I've put my shirt . . . no, not quite the right expression —
Lucasta's the most exciting speculation
I've ever thought of investing in.
Colby's more cautious. You know, Colby,
You and I ought to be in business together.
I'm a good guesser. But I sometimes guess wrong.
I make decisions on the spur of the moment,
But you'd never take a leap in the dark;
You'd keep me on the rails.

COLBY. That's just nonsense.
You only pretend that you're a gambler.
You've got as level a head as anyone,
And you never get involved in anything risky.
You like to pretend to other people
That you're a gambler. I don't believe you ever gamble
On anything that isn't a certainty.

KAGHAN. Well, there's something in that. You know, Lucasta,
Colby is a good judge of character.

LUCASTA. You'd need to be a better judge of character
Yourself, before you said that of Colby.

KAGHAN. Oh, I'm a good judge. Now, I'll tell you the difference
Between ourselves and Colby. You and me —
The one thing *we* want is security
And respectability! Now Colby
Doesn't really care about being respectable —
He was born and bred to it. I wasn't, Colby.
Do you know, I was a foundling? You didn't know that!
Never had any parents. Just adopted, from nowhere.
That's why I want to be a power in the City,
On the boards of all the solidest companies:
Because I've no background — no background at all.
That's one thing I like about Lucasta:
She doesn't despise me.

LUCASTA. Nobody could despise you.
And what's more important, you don't despise *me*.

KAGHAN. Nobody could despise *you*, Lucasta;
And we want the same things. But as for Colby,
He's the sort of fellow who might chuck it all
And go to live on a desert island.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

- But I hope you won't do that. We need you where you are.
- COLBY. I'm beginning to believe you've a pretty shrewd insight
Into things that have nothing to do with business.
- KAGHAN. And you have a very sound head for business.
Maybe you're a better financier than I am!
That's why we ought to be in business together.
- LUCASTA. You're both very good at paying compliments;
But I remarked that I was hungry.
- KAGHAN. You can't want dinner yet.
It's only six o'clock. We can't dine till eight;
Not at any restaurant that *you* like.
— For a change, let's talk about Lucasta.
- LUCASTA [*rising*]. If you want to discuss *me* . . .
[*A knock at the door. Enter LADY ELIZABETH*]
- LADY ELIZABETH. Oh, good evening.
Good evening, Mr. Kaghan. Good evening, Lucasta.
Have you just arrived, or are you just leaving?
- LUCASTA. We're on the point of leaving, Lady Elizabeth.
- LADY ELIZABETH. I've come over to have a look at the flat
Now that you've moved in. Because you can't tell
Whether a scheme of decoration
Is *right*, until the place has been lived in
By the person for whom it was designed.
So I have to see you in it. Did you say you were leaving?
- KAGHAN. We're going out to dinner. Lucasta's very hungry.
- LADY ELIZABETH. Hungry? At six o'clock? Where will you get dinner?
Oh, I know. It's a chance to try that Herbal Restaurant
I recommended to you. You can have dinner early:
Most of its patrons dine at half past six.
They have the most delicious salads!
And I told you, Mr. Kaghan, you're the type of person
Who needs to eat a great deal of salad.
You remember, I made you take a note of the address;
And I don't believe that you've been there yet.
- KAGHAN. Why no, as a matter of fact, I haven't.
I've kept meaning to. Shall we go there, Lucasta?
- LUCASTA. I'm so hungry, I could even eat a herbal salad.
- LADY ELIZABETH. That's right. Just mention my name, Mr. Kaghan,
And ask for the table in the left hand corner:
It has the best waitress. Good night.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

LUCASTA.

Good night.

KAGHAN. And thank you so much. You give such good advice.

[*Exeunt KAGHAN and LUCASTA*]

LADY ELIZABETH. Were those young people here by appointment?

Or did they come in unexpectedly?

COLBY. I'd invited Lucasta. She had asked me to play to her.

LADY ELIZABETH. You call her Lucasta? Young people nowadays

Seem to have dropped the use of surnames altogether.

But, Colby, I hope you won't mind a gentle hint.

I feared it was possible you might become too friendly

With Mr. Kaghan and Miss Angel.

I can see you've lived a rather sheltered life,

And I've noticed them paying you a good deal of attention.

You see, you're rather a curiosity

To both of them — you're not the sort of person

They ever meet in their kind of society.

So naturally, they want to take you up.

I can speak more freely, as an elderly person.

COLBY. But, Lady Elizabeth . . .

LADY ELIZABETH.

Well, older than you are,

And a good deal wiser in the ways of the world.

COLBY. But, Lady Elizabeth, what is it you object to?

They're both intelligent . . . and kind.

LADY ELIZABETH. Oh, I don't say they're not intelligent and kind.

I'm not making any malicious suggestions:

But they are rather worldly and materialistic,

And . . . well, rather vulgar. They're not your sort at all.

COLBY. I shouldn't call them vulgar. Perhaps I'm vulgar too.

But what, do you think, *is* my sort?

I don't know, myself. And I should like to know.

LADY ELIZABETH. In the first place, you ought to mix with people of breeding.

I said to myself, when I first saw you,

'He is very well bred'. I knew nothing about you,

But one doesn't need to know, if one knows what breeding is.

And, second, you need intellectual society.

Now, that already limits your acquaintance:

Because, what's surprising, well-bred people

Are sometimes far from intellectual;

And — what's less surprising — intellectual people

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Are often ill-bred. But that's not all.
You need intellectual, well-bred people
Of spirituality — and that's the rarest.

COLBY. That would limit my acquaintance to a very small number,
And I don't know where to find them.

LADY ELIZABETH. They can be found.

But I came to have a look at the flat
To see if the colour scheme really suited you.
I believe it does. The walls; and the curtains;
And most of the furniture. But, that writing-table!
Where did that writing-table come from?

COLBY. It's an office desk. Sir Claude got it for me.

I said I needed a desk in my room:

You see, I shall do a good deal of my work here.

LADY ELIZABETH. And what is that shrouded object on it?

Don't tell me it's a typewriter.

COLBY. It is a typewriter.

I've already begun to work here. At the moment

I'm working on a company report.

LADY ELIZABETH. I hadn't reckoned on reports and typewriters
When I designed this room.

COLBY. It's the sort of room I wanted.

LADY ELIZABETH [*rising*]. And I see a photograph in a silver
frame.

I'm afraid I shall have to instruct you, Colby.
Photographic portraits — even in silver frames —
Are much too intimate for the sitting-room.
May I remove it? Surely your bedroom
Is the proper place for photographic souvenirs.

[*She sits down, holding the portrait*]

What was I going to say? Oh, I know.

Do you believe in reincarnation?

COLBY. No, I don't. I mean, I've never thought about it.

LADY ELIZABETH. I can't say that I believe in it.

I did, for a time. I studied the doctrine.
But I was going to say, *if* I believed in it
I should have said that we had known each other
In some previous incarnation. — Is this your mother?

COLBY. No, that is my aunt. I never knew my mother.
She died when I was born.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

LADY ELIZABETH. She died when you were born.
Have you other near relatives? Brothers or sisters?

COLBY. No brothers or sisters. No. As for other relatives,
I never knew any, when I was a child.

I suppose I've never been interested . . . in relatives.

LADY ELIZABETH. You did not want to know your relatives!
I understand exactly how you felt.

How I disliked my parents! I had a governess;

Several, in fact. And I loathed them all.

Were you brought up by a governess?

COLBY. No. By my aunt.

LADY ELIZABETH. And did you loathe her? No, of course not.
Or you wouldn't have her portrait. If you never knew your
parents . . .

But was your father living?

COLBY. I never knew my father.

LADY ELIZABETH. Then, if you never had a governess,

And if you never knew either of your parents,

You can't understand what loathing really is.

Yet we must have *some* similarity of background.

COLBY. But you had parents. And no doubt, many relatives.

LADY ELIZABETH. Oh, swarms of relatives! And such unpleasant
people!

I thought of myself as a dove in an eagle's nest.

They were so carnivorous. Always killing things and eating them.

And yet our childhood must have been similar.

These are only superficial differences:

You must have been a lonely child, having no relatives —

No brothers or sisters — and I was lonely

Because they were so numerous — and so uncongenial.

They made me feel an outcast. And yet they were so commonplace.

Do you know, Colby, when I was a child

I had three obsessions, and I never told anyone.

I wonder if *you* had the same obsessions?

COLBY. What were they?

LADY ELIZABETH. The first was, that I was very ugly

And didn't know it. Then, that I was feeble-minded

And didn't know it. Finally,

That I was a foundling, and didn't know it.

Of course, I was terrified of being ugly,

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

And of being feeble-minded: though my family made me think so.
But you know, I actually *liked* to believe
That I was a foundling — or do I mean ‘changeling’?

COLBY. I don't know which you mean.

LADY ELIZABETH.

However that may be,
I didn't want to belong there. I refused to believe
That my father could have been an ordinary earl!
And I couldn't believe that my mother *was* my mother.
These were foolish fancies. I was a silly girl,
And very romantic. But it goes to show
How different I felt myself to be
And then I took up the Wisdom of the East
And believed, for a while, in reincarnation.
That seemed to explain it all. I don't believe it now.
That was only a phase. But it made it all so simple!
To be able to think that one's earthly parents
Are only the means that we have to employ
To become incarnate. And that one's real ancestry
Is one's previous existences. Of course, there's something in us,
In all of us, which isn't just heredity,
But something unique. Something we have been
From eternity. Something . . . straight from God.
That means that we are nearer to God than to anyone.
— Where did you live, as a child?

COLBY. In Teddington.

LADY ELIZABETH. Teddington? In what county?

COLBY. It's very close to London.

LADY ELIZABETH. Still, you were brought up, like me, in the country. Teddington. I seem to have heard of it.
Was it a large house?

COLBY. No, a very small one.

LADY ELIZABETH. But you had your aunt. And she was devoted to you,

**I have no doubt. What is your aunt's name?
Is it Simpkins?**

COLBY. No, a married aunt.

A widow. Her name is Mrs. Guzzard.

LADY ELIZABETH. Guzzard? Did you say Guzzard? An unusual name.
Guzzard, did you say? The name means something to me.
Yes, Guzzard. *That* is the name I've been hunting for!

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

COLBY. You may have come across the name before;

Although, as you say, it is an uncommon one.

You couldn't have known my aunt.

LADY ELIZABETH.

No. I never met . . . your aunt.

But the name is familiar. How old are you, Colby?

COLBY. I'm twenty-five.

LADY ELIZABETH. Twenty-five. What became of your father?

COLBY. Well . . . I didn't have a father.

You see . . . I was an illegitimate child.

LADY ELIZABETH. Oh yes. An illegitimate child.

So that the only relative you knew

Was Mrs. Guzzard. And you always called her 'aunt'?

COLBY. Why not? She was my aunt.

LADY ELIZABETH.

And as for your mother —

Mrs. Guzzard's sister, I suppose . . .

COLBY. Her sister — which makes Mrs. Guzzard my aunt.

LADY ELIZABETH. And are you quite sure that Mrs. Guzzard's sister —

Who you say was your mother — really was your mother?

COLBY. Why, Lady Elizabeth! Why should I doubt it?

That is not the kind of story my aunt would invent.

LADY ELIZABETH. Not if she *is* your aunt. Did Mrs. Guzzard

And Mr. Guzzard — have any children?

COLBY. They had no children of their own.

That is to say, they had had one little boy

Who died when I was very young indeed.

I don't remember him. I was told about him.

But I can't help wondering why you are so interested:

There's nothing very interesting about my background —

I assure you there isn't.

LADY ELIZABETH.

It may be more interesting

Than you are aware of. Colby . . .

[*A knock on the door*]

Who's that?

[*Enter SIR CLAUDE*]

SIR CLAUDE. Elizabeth! I was told that you were here with Colby.

So I came over instead of telephoning,

Just to give him these notes. They're notes for my speech

At the dinner of the Potters' Company.

COLBY. That's tomorrow night, I believe.

SIR CLAUDE.

Yes it is.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

But you know that I'll have to have my speech written out
And then memorise it. I can't use notes:
It's got to sound spontaneous. I've jotted down some headings.
Just see if you can develop them for me
With a few striking phrases. It should last about ten minutes.
And then we'll go over it tomorrow.

COLBY [*looking at the notes*]. I'll try.

SIR CLAUDE. It's just in ways like this, Elizabeth,
That Colby can be of greater help than Eggerson.
I couldn't have asked Eggerson to write a speech for me.
Oh, by the way, Colby, how's the piano?

COLBY. It's a wonderful piano. I've never played
On such an instrument. It's much too good for me.

SIR CLAUDE. You need a good piano. You'll play all the better.

LADY ELIZABETH. Claude!

SIR CLAUDE. What is it, Elizabeth?

LADY ELIZABETH. I've just made a startling discovery!

All through a name — and intuition.

But it shall be proved. The truth has come out.

It's Colby. Colby is my lost child!

SIR CLAUDE. What? Your child, Elizabeth? What on earth makes
you think so?

LADY ELIZABETH. I must see this Mrs. Guzzard. I must confront her.

This couldn't possibly be a coincidence.

It seems incredible, doesn't it, Claude?

And yet it would be still more incredible

If it were only a coincidence.

Perhaps I ought not to believe it yet,

Perhaps it is wrong of me to feel so sure,

But it seems that Providence has brought you back to me,

And you, Claude, and Eggerson have been the instruments.

I must be right. Claude, tell me I am right.

SIR CLAUDE. But Elizabeth, what has led you to believe
That Colby is your son?

LADY ELIZABETH. Oh, I forgot

In my excitement: you arrived the very moment

When the truth dawned on me. Mrs. Guzzard!

Claude, Colby was brought up by a Mrs. Guzzard.

SIR CLAUDE. I know that. But why should that make him your son?

LADY ELIZABETH. It's the name I've been hunting for all these years —

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

That, and the other name, *Teddington*:

Mrs. Guzzard of Teddington. That was all I knew.

Then Tony was killed, as you know, in Africa,

And I had lost the name. Mrs. Guzzard.

SIR CLAUDE. I'm beginning now to piece it together.

You've been asking Colby about his family . . .

LADY ELIZABETH. And when he mentioned *Teddington*, there was a faint echo —

And then Mrs. Guzzard! It must be true.

SIR CLAUDE. It is certainly a remarkable coincidence —

If it is a coincidence. But I'm afraid, Elizabeth,

What has happened is that, brooding on the past,

You began to think of Colby as what your son would be,

And then you began to see him as your son,

And then — any name you heard would have seemed the right one.

LADY ELIZABETH. Oh Claude, how can you be so sceptical!

We must see this Mrs. Guzzard, and get her to confess it.

SIR CLAUDE. I'm sorry, Elizabeth. If Mrs. Guzzard comes

To make her confession, it will be very different

From what you expect. I'm afraid, Colby,

It seems to me that we must let her know the truth.

COLBY. It seems to me . . . there is nothing for me —

Absolutely nothing — for me to say about it.

I must leave that to you.

SIR CLAUDE. I should have told you one day.

I've always loathed keeping such a thing from you.

I see now I might as well have told you before,

But I'd hoped — and now it seems a silly thought . . .

What happens is so like what one had planned for,

And yet such a travesty of all one's plans —

I'd hoped that you would become fond of Colby,

And that he might come to take the place of your own child,

If you got to know him first — and that you'd want to adopt him.

LADY ELIZABETH. But of course I want to adopt him, Claude!

That is, if one's allowed to adopt one's own child.

SIR CLAUDE. That's not what I meant. Elizabeth,

Colby is *my* son.

LADY ELIZABETH. Quite impossible, Claude!

You have a daughter. Now you want a son.

SIR CLAUDE. I'd never want to take your son away from you.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Perhaps you have a son. But it isn't Colby.
I ought to have told you, years ago.
I told you about Lucasta, and you told me
About your own . . . misfortune. And I almost told you
About Colby. I didn't. For such a foolish reason.
Absurd it sounds now. One child each —
That seemed fair enough — though yours had been lost,
And mine I couldn't lose. But if I had another
I thought you might think — 'and how many more?'
You might have suspected any number of children!
That seems grotesque now. But it influenced me.
And I found a better reason for keeping silent.
I came to see how you longed for a son of your own,
And I thought, I'll wait for children of *our* own,
And tell her then. And they never came.
And now I regret the decision bitterly.
I ought to have told you that I had a son.

LADY ELIZABETH. But why do you think that Colby is your son?

SIR CLAUDE. Colby is the son of Mrs. Guzzard's sister,
Who died when he was born. Mrs. Guzzard brought him up,
And I provided for his education.
I have watched him grow. And Mrs. Guzzard
Knows he is my son.

LADY ELIZABETH. But where were you, Claude,
When Colby was born?

SIR CLAUDE. Where was I? In Canada.
My father had sent me on a business tour
To learn about his overseas investments.

LADY ELIZABETH. Then how do you know that the sister had a child?
Perhaps Mrs. Guzzard invented the story. . . .

SIR CLAUDE. Why should she invent it? The child was expected.

LADY ELIZABETH. In order to get money from you, perhaps.
No, I shouldn't say that. But she had a child
Left on her hands. The father had died
And she'd never been told the name of the mother;
And the mother had forgotten the name of Mrs. Guzzard,
And I was the mother and the child was Colby;
And Mrs. Guzzard thought you would be happy
To think you had a son, and would do well by him —
Because you *did* care for the girl, didn't you?

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

SIR CLAUDE. Yes, I did care. Very much. I had never
Been in love before.

LADY ELIZABETH. Very well then.

That is the way it must have happened.

Oh, Claude, you know I'm rather weak in the head

Though I try to be clever. Do try to help me.

SIR CLAUDE. It could have happened. But I'm sure it didn't.

LADY ELIZABETH. Oh, Colby, doesn't your instinct tell you?

SIR CLAUDE. Yes, tell us everything that's in your mind.

I know this situation must be more of an agony

To you, than it can be even to . . . us.

COLBY. I only wish it was more acute agony:

I don't know whether I've been suffering or not

During this conversation. I only feel . . . numb.

If there's agony, it's part of a total agony

Which I can't begin to feel yet. I'm simply indifferent.

And all the time that you've been talking

I've only been thinking: 'What does it matter

Whose son I am?' You don't understand

That when one has lived without parents, as a child,

There's a gap that never can be filled. Never.

I like you both, I could even come to love you —

But as friends . . . older friends. Neither, as a parent.

I am sorry. But that's why I say it doesn't matter

To me, which of you should be my parent.

LADY ELIZABETH. But a mother, Colby, isn't that different?

There should always be a bond between mother and son,

No matter how long they have lost each other.

COLBY. No, Lady Elizabeth. The position is the same

Or crueller. Suppose I am your son.

Then it's merely a fact. Better not know

Than to know the fact and know it means nothing.

At the time I was born, you might have been my mother,

But you chose not to be. I don't blame you for that:

God forbid! but we must take the consequences.

At the time when I was born, your being my mother —

If you are my mother — was a living fact.

Now, it is a dead fact, and out of dead facts

Nothing living can spring. Now, it is too late.

I never wanted a parent till now —

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

I never thought about it. Now, you have made me think,
And I wish that I could have had a father and a mother.

LADY ELIZABETH. Stop, Colby! Something has come to me.
Claude! I don't want to take away from you
The son you thought was yours. And I know from what you said,
That you would rather he was *ours* than only *yours*.
Why should we make any further enquiries?
Let us regard him as being *our* son:
It won't be the same as what we had wanted —
But in some ways better! And prevent us both
From making unreasonable claims upon you, Colby.
It's a good idea! Why should we not be happy,
All of us? Already, Claude,
I feel as if this brought us closer together.

SIR CLAUDE. I should be contented with such an understanding;
And indeed, it's not so far from what I had intended.
Could you accept us both in that way, Colby?

COLBY. I can only say what I feel at the moment:
And yet I believe I shall always feel the same.

SIR CLAUDE. Well?

COLBY. It would be easier, I think,
To accept you both in the place of parents
If neither of you could be. If it was pure fiction —
One can live on a fiction — but not on such a mixture
Of fiction and fact. Already, it's been hard
For me, who have never known the feelings of a son,
To be disputed between two parents.
But, if we followed your suggestion,
I know, I know I should always be haunted
By the miserable ghosts of the other parents!
It's strange enough to have two parents —
But I should have four! What about those others?
I should have to live with those ghosts, one indignant
At being cheated of his — or her — parenthood,
The other indignant at the imputation
Of false parenthood. Both mocked at.

SIR CLAUDE. Then what do you want, Colby? What do you want?
Think of the future. When you marry
You will want parents, for the sake of your children.

COLBY. I don't feel, tonight, that I ever want to marry.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

You may be right. I can't take account of that.

But now I want to know whose son I am.

SIR CLAUDE. Then the first thing is: we must see Mrs. Guzzard.

LADY ELIZABETH. Oh Claude! I am terribly sorry for you.

I believe that if I had known of your . . . delusion

I would never have undeceived you.

SIR CLAUDE.

And as for me,

If I could have known what was going to happen,

I would gladly have surrendered Colby to you.

But we must see Mrs. Guzzard. I'll arrange to get her here.

LADY ELIZABETH. And I think you ought to get Eggerson as well.

SIR CLAUDE [*rising*]. Oh, of course, Eggerson! He knows all about it.

Let us say no more tonight. Now, Colby,

Can you find some consolation at the piano?

COLBY. I don't think, tonight, the piano would help me:

At the moment, I never want to touch it again.

But there's another reason. I must remind you

About your speech for the Potters' Company

Tomorrow night. I must get to work on it.

SIR CLAUDE. Tomorrow night. Must I go to that dinner

Tomorrow night?

COLBY. I was looking at your notes —

Before you brought me into the conversation —

And I found one note I couldn't understand.

'Reminiscent mood.' I can't develop that

Unless you can tell me — reminiscent of what?

SIR CLAUDE. Reminiscent of what? Reminiscent of what?

'Tonight I feel in a reminiscent mood' —

Oh yes. To say something of my early ambitions

To be a potter. Not that the Members

Of the Potters' Company know anything at all

About ceramics . . . or any other art.

No, I don't think I shall be in a reminiscent mood.

Cross that out. It would only remind me

Of things that would surprise the Potters' Company

If I told them what I was really remembering.

Come, Elizabeth.

LADY ELIZABETH. My poor Claude!

[*Exeunt SIR CLAUDE and LADY ELIZABETH*]

CURTAIN

Act Three

The Business Room, as in Act 1. Several mornings later. SIR CLAUDE is moving chairs about. Enter LADY ELIZABETH.

LADY ELIZABETH. Claude, what are you doing?

SIR CLAUDE. Settling the places.

It's important, when you have a difficult meeting,
To decide on the seating arrangements beforehand.
I don't think you and I should be near together.
Will you sit there, beside the desk?

LADY ELIZABETH. On the other side, with the light behind me:
But won't you be sitting at the desk yourself?

SIR CLAUDE. No, that would look too formal. I thought it would be better

To put Eggerson there, behind the desk.
You see, I want him to be a sort of chairman.

LADY ELIZABETH. That's a good idea.

SIR CLAUDE. On the other hand,

We mustn't look like a couple of barristers
Ready to cross-examine a witness.
It's very awkward. We don't want to start
By offending Mrs. Guzzard. That's why I thought
That Eggerson should put the first questions.
He's very good at approaching a subject
In a roundabout way. But where shall we place her?

LADY ELIZABETH. Over there, with the light full on her:
I want to be able to watch her expression.

SIR CLAUDE. But not in this chair! She must have an armchair . . .

LADY ELIZABETH. Not such a low one. Leave that in the corner
For Colby. He won't want to be conspicuous,
Poor boy!

SIR CLAUDE. After all, it was he who insisted
On this . . . investigation. But perhaps you're right.

LADY ELIZABETH. Claude, I've been thinking things over and over —

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

All through the night. I hardly slept at all.
I wish that Colby, somehow, might prove to be *your* son
Instead of mine. Really, I do!
It would be so much fairer. If he is mine —
As I am sure he is — then you never had a son;
While, if he were yours . . . he could still take the place
Of my son: and so he could be *our* son.
Oh dear, what do I want? I should like him to be mine,
But for you to believe that he is yours!
So I hope Mrs. Guzzard will say he is your son
And I needn't believe her. I don't believe in facts.
You do. That is the difference between us.

SIR CLAUDE. I'm not so sure of that. I've tried to believe in facts;
And I've always acted as if I believed in them.
I thought it was facts that my father believed in;
I thought that what he cared for was power and wealth;
And I came to see that what I had interpreted
In this way, was something else to *him* —
An idea, an inspiration. What he wanted to transmit to me
Was that idea, that inspiration,
Which to him was life. To me, it was a burden.
You can't communicate an inspiration,
Like that, by force of will. He was a great financier —
And I am merely a successful one.
I might have been truer to my father's inspiration
If I had done what I wanted to do.

LADY ELIZABETH. You've never talked like this to me before!
Why haven't you? I don't suppose I understand
And I know you don't think I understand anything,
And perhaps I don't. But I wish you would talk
Sometimes to me as if I did understand,
And perhaps I might come to understand better.
What did you want to do?

SIR CLAUDE. To be a potter.
Don't laugh.

LADY ELIZABETH. I'm not laughing. I was only thinking
How strange to have lived with you, all these years,
And now you tell me, you'd have liked to be a potter!
You really mean, to make jugs and jars
Like those in your collection?

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

SIR CLAUDE. That's what I mean.

LADY ELIZABETH. But I should have loved you to be a potter!
Why have you never told me?

SIR CLAUDE. I didn't think
That you would be interested. More than that.
I took it for granted that what you wanted
Was a husband of importance. I thought you would despise me
If you knew what I'd really wanted to be.

LADY ELIZABETH. And I took it for granted that you were not interested

In anything but financial affairs ;
And that you needed me chiefly as a hostess.
It's a great mistake, I do believe,
For married people to take anything for granted.

SIR CLAUDE. That was a very intelligent remark.
Perhaps I have taken too much for granted
About you, Elizabeth. What did *you* want?

LADY ELIZABETH. To inspire an artist. Don't laugh.

SIR CLAUDE. I'm not laughing.
So what you wanted was to inspire an artist!

LADY ELIZABETH. Or to inspire a poet. I thought Tony was a poet.
Because he wrote me poems. And he was so beautiful.
I know now that poets don't look like poets:
And financiers, it seems, don't look like potters —
Is that what I mean? I'm getting confused.
I thought I was escaping from a world that I loathed
In Tony — and then, too late, I discovered
He belonged to the world I wanted to escape from.
He was so commonplace! I wanted to forget him,
And so, I suppose, I wanted to forget
Colby. But Colby is an artist.

SIR CLAUDE. **A musician.**

I am a disappointed craftsman,
And Colby is a disappointed composer.
I should have been a second-rate potter,
And he would have been a second-rate organist.
We have both chosen . . . obedience to the facts.

LADY ELIZABETH. I believe that was what *I* was trying to do.
It's very strange, Claude, but this is the first time
I have talked to you, without feeling very stupid.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

You always made me feel that I wasn't worth talking to.

SIR CLAUDE. And you always made me feel that *your* interests
Were much too deep for discussion with *me*:
Health cures. And modern art — so long as it was modern —
And dervish dancing.

LADY ELIZABETH. Dervish dancing!
Really, Claude, how absurd you are!
Not that there isn't a lot to be learnt,
I don't doubt, from the dervish rituals.
But it doesn't matter what Mrs. Guzzard tells us,
If it satisfies Colby. Whatever happens
He shall be *our* son.

[*A knock on the door. Enter EGGERSON*]

SIR CLAUDE. Good morning, Eggerson.

EGGERSON. Good morning, Sir Claude. And Lady Elizabeth!

SIR CLAUDE. I'm sorry, Eggerson, to bring you up to London
At such short notice.

EGGERSON. Don't say that, Sir Claude.
It's true, I haven't much nowadays to bring me;
But Mrs. E. wishes I'd come up oftener!
Isn't that like the ladies! She used to complain
At my being up in London five or six days a week:
But now she says: 'You're becoming such a countryman!
You're losing touch with public affairs.'
The fact is, she misses the contact with London,
Though she doesn't admit it. She misses my news
When I came home in the evening. And the late editions
Of the papers that I picked up at Liverpool Street.
But I've so much to do, in Joshua Park —
Apart from the garden — that I've not an idle moment.
And really, now, I'm quite lost in London.
Every time I come, I notice the traffic
Has got so much worse.

SIR CLAUDE. Yes, it's always getting worse.

LADY ELIZABETH. — I hope Mrs. Eggerson is well?

EGGERSON. Pretty well.

She's always low-spirited, around this season,
When we're getting near the anniversary.

SIR CLAUDE. The anniversary? Of your son's death?

EGGERSON. Of the day we got the news. We don't often speak of it;

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Yet I know what's on her mind, for days beforehand.

But here I am, talking about ourselves!

And we've more important business, I imagine.

SIR CLAUDE. Eggerston, I'm expecting Mrs. Guzzard.

EGGERSON. Indeed! Mrs. Guzzard! And why are we expecting her?

SIR CLAUDE. I have asked her to come. Lady Elizabeth

Is sure that she knows the name of Mrs. Guzzard.

LADY ELIZABETH. Mrs. Guzzard, of Teddington.

EGGERSON. Ah, indeed!

I shouldn't have expected her name to be known to you.

SIR CLAUDE. She'd been questioning Colby about himself,

And he mentioned the name of his aunt, Mrs. Guzzard.

Now she's convinced that Mrs. Guzzard

Of Teddington is the name of the person

To whom her own child was entrusted.

EGGERSON. What an amazing coincidence!

SIR CLAUDE. That's what it is,

Unless she is mistaken . . .

LADY ELIZABETH. Now, Claude!

SIR CLAUDE. And she came to the conclusion that her child must be Colby,

So I told her the truth. But she cannot believe it.

LADY ELIZABETH. Claude, that's not quite right. Let me explain.

I am convinced that Sir Claude is mistaken,

Or has been deceived, and that Colby is my son.

I feel sure he is. But I don't want to know:

I am perfectly content to leave things as they are,

So that we may regard him as *our* son.

SIR CLAUDE. That is perfectly correct. It is Colby

Who is not satisfied with that solution.

He insists upon the facts. And that is why

I have asked Mrs. Guzzard here. *She* doesn't know that.

EGGERSON. A natural line for Mr. Simpkins to take,

If I may say so. Of course, we might discover

Another Mrs. Guzzard . . .

LADY ELIZABETH. Two Mrs. Guzzards?

EGGERSON. I agree, it is a most uncommon name,

But stranger things have happened.

LADY ELIZABETH. And both in Teddington?

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

EGGERSON. I agree, that would be most surprising.

And at the same address?

LADY ELIZABETH. I don't know the address.

Mrs. Guzzard of Teddington, that's all I know,

And that I could swear to.

EGGERSON. It does seem unlikely

That there should be two Mrs. Guzzards in Teddington.

But assuming, for the moment, only one Mrs. Guzzard,

Could there not have been two babies?

LADY ELIZABETH. *Two* babies, Eggerston?

EGGERSON. I was only suggesting

That perhaps Mrs. Guzzard made a profession

Of . . . looking after other people's children?

In a manner of speaking, it's perfectly respectable.

SIR CLAUDE. You're suggesting that she ran a baby farm.

That's most unlikely, nowadays.

Besides, I should have noticed it. I visited her house

Often. I never saw more than one baby.

EGGERSON. She might have taken in another one

As a temporary accommodation —

On suitable terms. But if she did that,

We must enquire what became of the other one.

SIR CLAUDE. But *this* baby was Colby.

LADY ELIZABETH. Of course it was Colby.

SIR CLAUDE. But Eggerston, you really can't ask me to believe

That she took two babies, and got them mixed.

LADY ELIZABETH. That seems to be what happened. And now we must
find out

What became of your child, Claude.

SIR CLAUDE. What became of *my* child!

The mother of *my* child was Mrs. Guzzard's sister.

She wouldn't dispose of *him*. It's your child, Elizabeth,

Whom we must try to trace.

EGGERSON. If there was another child

Then we must try to trace it. Certainly, Sir Claude:

Our first step must be to question Mrs. Guzzard.

SIR CLAUDE. And that's what we are here for. She will be here shortly.

And when she arrives I will summon Colby.

I wanted you here first, to explain the situation:

And I thought I would like you to conduct the proceedings.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Will you sit at the desk?

EGGERSON. If you wish, Sir Claude.

I do feel more at ease when I'm behind a desk:

It's second nature.

SIR CLAUDE. And put the case to her.

Don't let her think that I have any doubts:

You are putting the questions on behalf of my wife.

EGGERSON. I understand, Sir Claude: I understand completely.

[*A knock on the door*]

SIR CLAUDE. Good Lord, she's here already! Well . . . Come in!

[*Enter LUCASTA*]

LUCASTA. Is this a meeting? I came to speak to Colby.

I'm sorry.

SIR CLAUDE. Colby will be here.

But you're not involved in this meeting, Lucasta.

Won't it do another time?

LUCASTA. I came to apologise

To Colby. No matter. It'll do another time.

Oh, I'm glad you're here, Eggy! You're such a support.

In any case, I've an announcement to make,

And I might as well make it now. If you'll listen.

SIR CLAUDE. Of course I'll listen. But we haven't much time.

LUCASTA. It won't take much time. I'm going to marry B.

SIR CLAUDE. To marry B.! But I thought that was all settled.

LUCASTA. Yes, of course, Claude. You thought everything settled.

That was just the trouble. You made it so obvious

That this would be the ideal solution

From your point of view. To get me off your hands.

Oh, I know what a nuisance you've always found me!

And I haven't made it easier. I didn't try to.

And knowing that you wanted me to marry B.

Made me determined that I wouldn't. Just to spite you,

I dare say. That was why I took an interest

In Colby. Because you thought he was too good for me.

SIR CLAUDE. In Colby!

LUCASTA. Why not? That's perfectly natural.

But I'm grateful to Colby. But for Colby

I'd never have come to appreciate B.

SIR CLAUDE. But Colby! Lucasta, if I'd suspected this

I would have explained. Colby is your brother.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

EGGERSON. Half-brother, Miss Angel.

SIR CLAUDE. Yes, half-brother.

LUCASTA. What do you mean?

SIR CLAUDE. Colby is my son.

LADY ELIZABETH. That is what Sir Claude believes. Claude, let me explain.

SIR CLAUDE. No, I'll explain. There's been some misunderstanding.
My wife believes that Colby is *her* son.

That is the reason for this meeting today.

We're awaiting Mrs. Guzzard — Colby's aunt.

LUCASTA. Colby's aunt? You make my brain reel.

SIR CLAUDE. I ought to have made things clear to you
At the time when he came here. But I didn't trust you
To keep a secret. There were reasons for that
Which no longer exist. But I ought to have told you.

LUCASTA. Well, I don't understand. What I do understand
Is Colby's behaviour. If he knew it.

SIR CLAUDE. He knew it.

LUCASTA. Why didn't he tell me? Perhaps he was about to.

Anyway, I *knew* there had been some mistake.

You don't know at all what I'm talking about!

But if he knew that he was your son

He must have been staggered when I said I was your daughter!

I came to thank him for the shock he'd given me.

He made me see what I really wanted.

B. makes me feel safe. And that's what I want.

And somehow or other, I've something to give him —

Something that he needs. Colby doesn't need me,

He doesn't need anyone. He's fascinating,

But he's undependable. He has his own world,

And he might vanish into it at any moment —

At just the moment when you needed him most!

And he doesn't depend upon other people, either.

B. needs me. He's been hurt by life, just as I have,

And we can help each other. Oh, I know you think of him

Simply as a business man. As you thought of me

Simply as a nuisance. We're suited to each other:

You thought so too, Claude, but for the wrong reasons,

And that put me off. So I'm grateful to Colby.

SIR CLAUDE. I don't know what's happened, but nevertheless

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

I'm sure that you have made the right decision.

LUCASTA. But the reasons why you think so are the wrong ones.

LADY ELIZABETH. And I'm sure too, Lucasta, you have made a wise decision.

LUCASTA. And I know very well why *you* think so:

You think we're suited because we're both common.

B. knows you think him common. And so he pretends

To be very common, because he knows you think so.

You gave us our parts. And we've shown that we can play them.

LADY ELIZABETH. I don't think you ought to say that, Lucasta;

I have always been a person of liberal views —

That's why I never got on with my family.

LUCASTA. Well, I'm not a person of liberal views.

I'm very conventional. And I'm not ashamed of it.

SIR CLAUDE. Perhaps you are right. I'm not sure of anything.

Perhaps, as you say, I've misunderstood B.,

And I've never thought that I understood *you*;

And I certainly fail to understand Colby.

LADY ELIZABETH. But you and I, Claude, can understand each other,

No matter how late. And perhaps that will help us

To understand other people. I hope so.

Lucasta, I regard you as a . . . step-daughter;

And shall be happy to accept Mr. Kaghan as a son-in-law.

LUCASTA. Thank you. I'm sure he'll appreciate *that*.

But that reminds me. He's waiting downstairs.

I don't suppose you want *us* at your meeting.

EGGERSON. Allow me. May I make a suggestion?

Though first of all I must take the occasion

To wish Miss Angel every happiness.

And I'm sure she will be happy. Mr. Kaghan

Is one of the most promising young men in the City,

And he has a heart of gold. So have you, Miss Angel.

We have this very important interview,

But I'm sure that we want to greet the happy pair.

It's all in the family. Why not let them wait downstairs

And come back after Mrs. Guzzard has left?

SIR CLAUDE. That's not a bad idea. If Colby agrees.

LUCASTA. I trust you, Eggy. And I want to make my peace with him.

SIR CLAUDE. We'll get him now.

[*Reaches for the telephone*]

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

[*A knock. Enter COLBY*]

COLBY. Have I come too soon?

I'm afraid I got impatient of waiting.

LUCASTA. Colby! I've not come to interrupt your meeting.

I've been told what it's about. But I did come to see you.

I came to apologise for my behaviour

The other afternoon.

COLBY. Apologise?

SIR CLAUDE. I've told her.

COLBY. But why should you apologise?

LUCASTA. Oh, because I knew

That I must have misunderstood your reaction.

It wouldn't have been like you — the way I thought it was.

You're much too . . . detached, ever to be shocked

In the way I thought you were. I was ashamed

Of what I was telling you, and so I was expecting

What I thought I got. But I couldn't believe it!

It isn't like you, to despise people:

You don't care enough.

COLBY. I don't care enough?

LUCASTA. No. You're either above caring,

Or else you're insensible — I don't mean insensitive!

But you're terribly cold. Or else you've some fire

To warm you, that isn't the same kind of fire

That warms other people. You're either an egotist

Or something so different from the rest of us

That we can't judge you. That's you, Colby.

COLBY. That's me, is it? I simply don't know.

Perhaps you know me better than I know myself.

But now that you know what I am . . .

LUCASTA. *Who you are,*

In the sense I've been told that you're my brother;

Which makes it more difficult to know *what* you are.

It may be there's no one so hard to understand

As one's brother . . .

COLBY. Or sister . . .

LUCASTA. *What's so difficult*

Is to recognise the limits of one's understanding.

It may be that understanding, as a brother and a sister,

Will come, in time. Perhaps, one day

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

We may understand each other. And accept the fact
That we're not necessary to each other
In the way we might have been. But a different way
That reveals itself in time. And perhaps — who knows? —
We might become more necessary to each other,
As a brother and a sister, than we could have been
In any other form of relationship.

COLBY. I want you to be happy.

LUCASTA. I shall be happy,
If you will accept me as a sister
For the happiness that relationship may bring us
In twenty or thirty or forty years' time.
I shall be happy. I'm going to marry B.
I know you like B.

COLBY. I'm very fond of him;
And I'm glad to think he'll be my brother-in-law.
I shall need you, both of you, Lucasta!

LUCASTA. We'll mean something to you. But you don't *need* anybody.

EGGERSON. And now may I interrupt, Miss Angel?
Why shouldn't you and Mr. Kaghan wait downstairs
And rejoin us when this interview is over?
I'm sure Mr. Simpkins will concur in this proposal.

COLBY. Of course I'd like them . . . Can't B. come up now?

EGGERSON. Better wait till afterwards.

SIR CLAUDE. Quite right, Eggerson.

LUCASTA. Good-bye, Colby.

COLBY. Why do you say good-bye?

LUCASTA. Good-bye to Colby as Lucasta knew him,
And good-bye to the Lucasta whom Colby knew.
We've changed since then: as you said, we're always changing.
When I come back, we'll be brother and sister —
Or so I hope. Yes, in any event,
Good-bye, Colby.

[Exit LUCASTA]

COLBY. Good-bye then, Lucasta.

EGGERSON. And now, how soon are we expecting Mrs. Guzzard?

SIR CLAUDE [looking at his watch]. She ought to be here now! It's
surprising,

I hadn't been aware how the time was passing,
What with Lucasta's unexpected visit.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

She ought to be here. It wouldn't be like her
To be late for an appointment. She always mentioned it
If I was late when I went to see her.

[Enter LUCASTA]

LUCASTA. I'm sorry to come back. It's an anti-climax.
But there seems to be nobody to answer the door.
I've just let someone in. It's the Mrs. Guzzard
Whom you are expecting. She looks rather formidable.

SIR CLAUDE. It's Parkman's day off. But where's the parlourmaid?

LUCASTA. I thought I heard someone singing in the pantry.

LADY ELIZABETH. Oh, I forgot. It's Gertrude's quiet hour.
I've been giving her lessons in recollection.
But she shouldn't be singing.

LUCASTA. Well, what shall I do?

EGGERSON. Let me go down and explain to Mrs. Guzzard
And then bring her up.

SIR CLAUDE. No, I want you here, Eggerson.
Will you show her up, Lucasta?

LUCASTA. I'll make B. do it.

[Exit LUCASTA]

SIR CLAUDE. I wish you could arrange the servants' time-table better.
This is a most unfortunate beginning.

LADY ELIZABETH. She's been making progress, under my direction;
But she shouldn't have been singing.

SIR CLAUDE. Well, are we ready?

[A quiet knock. Enter KAGHAN, escorting MRS. GUZZARD. Exit KAGHAN]
Good morning, Mrs. Guzzard. I must apologise:
I'm afraid there has been some domestic incompetence.
You should have been announced.

MRS. GUZZARD. I believe I was punctual.
But I didn't mind waiting in the least, Sir Claude.
I know that you are always much engaged.

SIR CLAUDE. First, let me introduce you to my wife.
Lady Elizabeth Mulhammer.

LADY ELIZABETH. Good morning, Mrs. Guzzard.
You don't know me, but I know about you:
We have more in common than you are aware of.

MRS. GUZZARD. I suppose you mean Colby?

LADY ELIZABETH. Yes. To do with Colby.

SIR CLAUDE. Elizabeth, you know we are to leave that to Eggerson.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

This is Mr. Eggerson, Mrs. Guzzard:
My confidential clerk. That is to say,
Colby's predecessor, who recently retired.
Now he lives . . . in the country. But he knows the whole story.
He's been in my confidence — and I may say, my friend —
For very many years. So I asked him to be present.
I hope you don't mind?

MRS. GUZZARD. Why should I mind?

I have heard about Mr. Eggerson from Colby.
I am very happy to make his acquaintance.

SIR CLAUDE. And I thought he might . . . conduct the proceedings:
He's the very soul of tact and discretion.

MRS. GUZZARD. Certainly, Sir Claude, if that is what you wish.
But is the subject of this meeting —
I suppose to do with Colby — so very confidential?

EGGERSON. Yes, that is what I should call it, Mrs. Guzzard.
I take it, Sir Claude, I should open the discussion?

SIR CLAUDE. If you please, Eggerson.

EGGERSON. Then let's make a start.
The question has to do, as you surmised, with Mr. Simpkins.
It also concerns a problem of paternity.

LADY ELIZABETH. Or of maternity.

SIR CLAUDE. Don't interrupt, Elizabeth.

MRS. GUZZARD. I don't understand you.

EGGERSON. It's this way, Mrs. Guzzard.

It is only recently that Lady Elizabeth
Heard your name mentioned, by Mr. Simpkins.
She was struck by your name and your living in Teddington.
And now we must go back, many years:
Well, not so many years — when you get to my age
The past and the future both seem very brief —
But long enough ago for the question to be possible.
Lady Elizabeth, before her marriage
Had a child . . .

LADY ELIZABETH. A son.

EGGERSON. Had a son
Whom she could not, in the circumstances, acknowledge.
That happens not infrequently, Mrs. Guzzard.

MRS. GUZZARD. So I am aware. I have known it to happen.

EGGERSON. — Who was taken charge of by the father.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

That is to say, placed out to be cared for
Till further notice by a foster-mother.
Unfortunately, the father died suddenly . . .

LADY ELIZABETH. He was run over. By a rhinoceros
In Tanganyika.

SIR CLAUDE. That's not relevant.
Leave it to Eggerson.

EGGERSON. The father died abroad.
Lady Elizabeth did not know the name of the lady
Who had taken the child. Or rather, had forgotten it.
She was not, in any case, in a position
In which she could have instituted enquiries.
So, for many years, she has been without a clue
Until the other day. This son, Mrs. Guzzard,
If he is alive, must be a grown man.
I believe you have had no children of your own;
But I'm sure you can sympathise.

MRS. GUZZARD. I can sympathise.
I had a child, and lost him. Not in the way
That Lady Elizabeth's child was lost.
Let us hope that her son may be restored to her.

EGGERSON. That is exactly what we are aiming at.
We have a clue — or what appears to be a clue.
That is why Sir Claude has asked you to be present.

MRS. GUZZARD. You think that I might be able to help you?

EGGERSON. It seems just possible. A few days ago,
As I said, Lady Elizabeth learned your name;
And the name struck her as being familiar.

MRS. GUZZARD. Indeed? It is not a very common name.

EGGERSON. That is what impressed her. Mrs. Guzzard
Of Teddington! Lady Elizabeth is convinced
That it was a Mrs. Guzzard of Teddington
To whom her new-born child was confided.
Of course she might be mistaken about Teddington . . .

LADY ELIZABETH. I am *not* mistaken about Teddington.

EGGERSON. I am only suggesting, Lady Elizabeth,
There are other places that sound like Teddington
But not so many names that sound like Guzzard —
Or if there are, they are equally uncommon.
But, Mrs. Guzzard, this is where you can help us —

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Do you know of any other Mrs. Guzzard?

MRS. GUZZARD. None.

EGGERSON. Whether, I mean, in Teddington or elsewhere?

Now I must ask a more delicate question :

Did you, at any time, take in a child —

A child, that is, of parents unknown to you —

Under such conditions?

MRS. GUZZARD. Yes, I did take in a child.

My husband and I were childless . . . at the time,

And very poor. It offered two advantages.

EGGERSON. And did you know the name of the father

Or of the mother?

MRS. GUZZARD. I was not told either.

I understood the child was very well connected :

Otherwise, I should not have taken him.

But he was brought to me by a third party,

Through whom the monthly payments were made.

EGGERSON. The terms were satisfactory?

MRS. GUZZARD. Very satisfactory —

So long, that is to say, as the money was forthcoming.

EGGERSON. Did the payments come to an end?

MRS. GUZZARD. Very suddenly.

LADY ELIZABETH. That must have been when Tony met with his accident.

MRS. GUZZARD. I was informed that the father had died

Without making a will.

LADY ELIZABETH. He was very careless.

MRS. GUZZARD. And that the heirs acknowledged no responsibility.

The mother, I suppose, could have got an order

If she could have established the paternity ;

But I didn't know who she was ! What could I do?

LADY ELIZABETH. Oh, Claude, you see? You understand, Colby?

SIR CLAUDE. Don't be certain yet, Elizabeth.

LADY ELIZABETH. There is no doubt about it.

Colby is my son.

MRS. GUZZARD. Your son, Lady Elizabeth?

Are you suggesting that I kept a child of yours

And deceived Sir Claude by pretending it was his?

SIR CLAUDE. That is just the point. My wife has convinced herself

That Colby is her son. I know he is *my* son.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

And I asked you here so that you might tell her so.

EGGERSON. Don't take this as a personal reflection,
Mrs. Guzzard. Far from it. You must make allowances
For a mother who has been hoping against hope
To find her son. Put yourself in her position.
If you had lost your son, in a similar way,
Wouldn't you grasp at any straw
That offered hope of finding him?

MRS. GUZZARD. Perhaps I should.

LADY ELIZABETH. There isn't a shadow of doubt in my mind.
I'm surprised that you, Eggerston, with your legal training,
Should talk about straws! Colby is my son.

MRS. GUZZARD. In the circumstances, I ignore that remark.

EGGERSON. May I pour a drop of oil on these troubled waters?

Let us approach the question from another angle,
And ask Mrs. Guzzard what became of the child
She took in, which may have been Lady Elizabeth's.

SIR CLAUDE. That's a very sensible suggestion, Eggerston.
A breath of sanity. Thank you for that.

MRS. GUZZARD. We parted with it. A dear little boy.
I was happy to have him while the payments were made;
But we could not afford to adopt the child,
Or continue to keep him, when the payments ended.

EGGERSON. And how did you dispose of him?

MRS. GUZZARD. We had neighbours
Who were childless, and eager to adopt a child.
They had taken a fancy to him. So they adopted him.
Then they left Teddington, and we lost sight of them.

EGGERSON. But you know their name?

MRS. GUZZARD. Yes, I know their name:
Like mine, a somewhat unusual one.
Perhaps it might be possible to trace them.
The name was Kaghan.

SIR CLAUDE. Their name was Kaghan!

MRS. GUZZARD. K-A-G-H-A-N. An odd name.

They were excellent people. Nonconformists.

EGGERSON. And the child, I suppose he had a Christian name?

MRS. GUZZARD. There was nothing to show that the child had been
baptised
When it came to us; but we could not be sure.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

My husband was particular in such matters,

So we had it given conditional baptism.

EGGERSON. What name did you give him?

MRS. GUZZARD.

We named the child Barnabas.

LADY ELIZABETH. Barnabas? There's never been such a name

In my family. Or, I'm sure, in his father's.

But how did he come to be called Colby?

SIR CLAUDE. But, Elizabeth, it isn't Colby!

Don't you see who it is?

MRS. GUZZARD.

My husband chose the name.

We had been married in the church of St. Barnabas.

COLBY. Barnabas Kaghan. Is he the little cousin

Who died? Don't you remember, Aunt Sarah,

My finding a rattle and a jingle-bell,

And your telling me I had had a little cousin

Who had died?

MRS. GUZZARD. Yes, Colby, that is what I told you.

LADY ELIZABETH. So my child is living. I was sure of that.

But I believe that Colby is Barnabas.

SIR CLAUDE. No, Elizabeth, Barnabas is Barnabas.

I must explain this, Mrs. Guzzard.

I have a very promising young colleague —

In fact, the young man who showed you upstairs —

Whose name is Barnabas Kaghan.

LADY ELIZABETH.

Barnabas?

SIR CLAUDE. Yes, Elizabeth. He sometimes has to sign his full name.

But he doesn't like the name, for some reason;

So we call him B.

MRS. GUZZARD.

A very good name.

He ought to be proud of it.

LADY ELIZABETH.

How old is this Barnabas?

SIR CLAUDE. About twenty-eight, I think.

MRS. GUZZARD.

He should be twenty-eight.

LADY ELIZABETH. Then I must be out in my calculations.

SIR CLAUDE. That wouldn't surprise me.

LADY ELIZABETH.

Yes, what year was it?

I'm getting so confused. What with Colby being Barnabas —

I mean, not Barnabas. And Mr. Kaghan

Being Barnabas. I suppose I'll get used to it.

COLBY. But he's waiting downstairs! Isn't this the moment

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

For me to bring him up? And Lucasta?

EGGERSON. An excellent suggestion, Mr. Simpkins.

[Exit COLBY]

EGGERSON. And now, if you agree, Lady Elizabeth,
We can ask Mr. Kaghan about his parents;
And if Mr. and Mrs. Kaghan are still living
Mrs. Guzzard should be able to identify them.

LADY ELIZABETH. And will that prove that Mr. Kaghan —
This Mr. Kaghan — is my son?

EGGERSON. It creates an inherent probability —
If that's the right expression.

SIR CLAUDE. I believe, Elizabeth,
That you have found your son.

EGGERSON. Subject to confirmation.

LADY ELIZABETH. And to my being able to adjust myself to it.
[Re-enter COLBY, with KAGHAN and LUCASTA]

COLBY. I have told them to be prepared for a surprise.

LADY ELIZABETH. Barnabas! Is your name Barnabas?

KAGHAN. Why, yes, it is. Did you tell her, Sir Claude?

SIR CLAUDE. No, B. It was Mrs. Guzzard who revealed it.
This is Mr. Barnabas Kaghan —

Mrs. Guzzard. And . . . my daughter Lucasta.

KAGHAN. But how did Mrs. Guzzard know my name?

MRS. GUZZARD. Were Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Kaghan your parents?

KAGHAN. Yes. They are. My adoptive parents.

MRS. GUZZARD. And did they at one time live in Teddington?

KAGHAN. I believe they did. But why are you interested?

MRS. GUZZARD. Lady Elizabeth, I believe that this is your son.
If so, I am cleared from your unjust suspicion.

EGGERSON. Mr. Kaghan, are your adoptive parents living?

KAGHAN. In Kent. They wanted to retire to the country.

So I found them a little place near Sevenoaks

Where they keep bees. But why are you asking?

LADY ELIZABETH. Because, Barnabas, it seems you are my son.

EGGERSON. You will wish to obtain confirmation

Of this interesting discovery, Mr. Kaghan,

By putting your adoptive parents in touch

With Mrs. Guzzard. It's for them to confirm

That they took you, as a child, from Mrs. Guzzard,

To whom, it seems, you had first been entrusted.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

KAGHAN. I really don't know what emotion to register . . .

LUCASTA. You don't need to talk *that language* any longer:
Just say you're embarrassed.

KAGHAN. Well, I am embarrassed.
If Lady Elizabeth is my mother . . .

LADY ELIZABETH. There is no doubt whatever about it, Barnabas.
I am your mother.

KAGHAN. But who was my father?

LADY ELIZABETH. He died very suddenly. Of a fatal accident
When you were very young. That is why you were adopted.

KAGHAN. But what did he do? Was he a financier?

LADY ELIZABETH. He was not good at figures. Your business ability
Comes, I suppose, from my side of the family.
But he was in a very good regiment —
For a time, at least.

KAGHAN. Well, I must get used to that.
But I should like to know how I ought to address you,
Lady Elizabeth. I've always been accustomed
To regard Mrs. Kaghan as my mother.

LADY ELIZABETH. Then in order to avoid any danger of confusion
You may address me as Aunt Elizabeth.

KAGHAN. That's easier, certainly.

LADY ELIZABETH. And I shall wish to meet them.
Claude, we must invite the Kaghans to dinner.

SIR CLAUDE. By all means, Elizabeth.

KAGHAN. But, Lady Elizabeth —
I mean, Aunt Elizabeth: if I call you Aunt Elizabeth
Would you mind very much calling me . . . just 'B'?

LADY ELIZABETH. Certainly, if you prefer that, Barnabas.

LUCASTA. Why is it that you don't like the name of Barnabas?

KAGHAN. I don't want people calling me 'Barney' —
Barney Kaghan! Kaghan's all right.

But Barney Kaghan — it sounds rather flashy:
It wouldn't make the right impression in the City.

LUCASTA. When you're an alderman, you'll be Sir Barney Kaghan!

LADY ELIZABETH. And I'm very glad you're announcing your
engagement.

Lucasta, I shall take charge of your wedding.

LUCASTA. We'd meant to be married very quietly
In a register office.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

LADY ELIZABETH. You must have a church wedding.

MRS. GUZZARD. I am glad to hear you say so, Lady Elizabeth.

But are *you* satisfied?

LADY ELIZABETH. Satisfied? What about?

MRS. GUZZARD. That your suspicions of me were wholly unfounded.

LADY ELIZABETH. Oh, Mrs. Guzzard, I had no suspicions!

I thought there had been a confusion — that's all.

MRS. GUZZARD. I feared there might be a confusion in your mind

Between the meaning of *confusion* and *imposture*.

SIR CLAUDE. I don't think there is any confusion now:

I'm sure that my wife is perfectly convinced;

And Mr. Kaghan's . . . mother, I am sure, will confirm it.

MRS. GUZZARD. That is as much to my interest as anyone's.

But will your wife be satisfied,

When she has the evidence the Kaghans will supply,

To recognise Barnabas Kaghan as her son?

[To LADY ELIZABETH] Are you contented to have him as your son?

SIR CLAUDE. That seems a strange question, Mrs. Guzzard.

MRS. GUZZARD. I have been asked here to answer strange questions —

And now it is my turn to ask them.

I should like to gratify everyone's wishes.

LADY ELIZABETH. Oh, of course . . . Yes, I'm sure . . . I shall be very happy.

MRS. GUZZARD. You wished for your son, and now you have your son.

We all of us have to adapt ourselves

To the wish that is granted. That can be a painful process,

As I know. And you, Barnabas Kaghan,

Are you satisfied to find yourself the son

Of Lady Elizabeth Mulhammer?

KAGHAN. It's very much better than being a foundling —

If I can live up to it. And . . . yes, of course,

If I can make it right with my parents.

I'm fond of them, you know.

LADY ELIZABETH. I shall see to that, Barnabas.

KAGHAN. B. — if you don't mind, Aunt Elizabeth.

LADY ELIZABETH. B. — and I'm sure we shall become great friends.

EGGERSON. I'm sure we all wish for nothing better.

MRS. GUZZARD. Wishes, when realised, sometimes turn

Against those who have made them.

[To LADY ELIZABETH and KAGHAN] Not, I think, with you.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

[To LUCASTA] Nor, so far as I can judge, with you.

Perhaps you are the wisest wisher here:

I shall not ask you whether you are satisfied

To be the wife of Barnabas Kaghan,

The daughter-in-law of Lady Elizabeth,

And the daughter of Sir Claude Mulhammer.

SIR CLAUDE. That is *my* concern — that she shall be satisfied
To be my daughter.

MRS. GUZZARD. Now, Colby,

I must ask *you* now, have you had your wish?

SIR CLAUDE. Colby only wanted to be sure of the truth.

COLBY. That is a very strange question, Aunt Sarah:

To which I can only give a strange answer.

Sir Claude is right: I wished to know the truth.

What it is, doesn't matter. All I wanted was relief

From the nagging annoyance of knowing there's a fact

That one doesn't know. But the fact itself

Is unimportant, once one knows it.

MRS. GUZZARD. You had no preference? Between a father and a
mother?

COLBY. I've never had a father or a mother —

It's different for B. He's had his foster-parents,

So he can afford another relationship.

Let my mother rest in peace. As for a father —

I have the idea of a father.

It's only just come to me. I should like a father

Whom I have never known and couldn't know now,

Because he would have died before I was born

Or before I could remember; whom I could get to know

Only by report, by documents —

The story of his life, of his success or failure . . .

Perhaps his failure more than his success —

By objects that belonged to him, and faded photographs

In which I should try to decipher a likeness;

Whose image I could create in my own mind,

To live with that image. An ordinary man

Whose life I could in some way perpetuate

By being the person he would have liked to be,

And by doing the things he had wanted to do.

MRS. GUZZARD. Whose son would you wish to be, Colby:

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Sir Claude's — or the son of some other man
Obscure and silent? A dead man, Colby.
Be careful what you say.

COLBY. A dead obscure man.

MRS. GUZZARD. You shall have your wish. And when you have your wish

You will have to come to terms with it. You shall have a father
Dead, and unknown to you.

SIR CLAUDE. What do you mean?

MRS. GUZZARD. Colby is not your son, Sir Claude.

COLBY. Who was my father, then?

MRS. GUZZARD. Herbert Guzzard.

You are the son of a disappointed musician.

COLBY. And who was my mother?

MRS. GUZZARD. Let your mother rest in peace.

I *was* your mother; but I chose to be your aunt.

So you may have your wish, and have no mother.

SIR CLAUDE. Mrs. Guzzard, this is perfectly incredible!

You couldn't have carried out such a deception

Over all these years. And why *should* you have deceived me?

EGGERSON. Mrs. Guzzard, can you substantiate this statement?

MRS. GUZZARD. Registration of birth. To Herbert and Sarah Guzzard
A son.

EGGERSON. And what about your sister and her child?

MRS. GUZZARD. Registration of death. The child was never born.

SIR CLAUDE. I don't believe it. I simply can't believe it.

Mrs. Guzzard, you are inventing this fiction

In response to what Colby said he wanted.

EGGERSON. I'll examine the records myself, Sir Claude.

Not that we doubt your word, Mrs. Guzzard:

But in a matter of such extreme importance

You'll understand the need for exact confirmation.

MRS. GUZZARD. I understand that, Mr. Eggerston. Quite well.

SIR CLAUDE. I shall not believe it. I'll not believe those records.

You pretend to have carried out a deception

For twenty-five years? It's quite impossible.

MRS. GUZZARD. I had no intention of deceiving you, Sir Claude,

Till you deceived yourself. When you went to Canada

My sister found that she was to have a child:

That much is true. I also was expecting one.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

That you did not know. It did not concern you.
As I have just said, my sister died
Before the child could be born. You were very far away;
I sent you a message, which never reached you.
On your return, you came at once to see me;
And I found that I had to break the news to you.
You saw the child. You assumed that it was yours;
And you were so pleased, I shrank, at the moment,
From undeceiving you. And then I thought — why not?
My husband also had died. I was left very poor.
If I let you continue to think the child was yours,
My son was assured of a proper start in life —
That I knew. And it would make you so happy!
If I said the child was mine, what future could he have?
And then I was frightened by what I had done.
Though I had never said 'this child is yours',
I feared you would ask for the birth certificate.
You never did. And so it went on.

SIR CLAUDE. This is horribly plausible. But it can't be true.

MRS. GUZZARD. Consider, Sir Claude. Would I tell you all this

Unless it was true? In telling you the truth
I am sacrificing my ambitions for Colby.
I am sacrificing also my previous sacrifice.
This is even greater than the sacrifice I made
When I let you claim him. Do you think it is a small thing
For me, to see my life's ambition come to nothing?
When I gave up my place as Colby's mother
I gave up something I could never have back.
Don't you understand that this revelation
Drives the knife deeper and twists it in the wound?
I had very much rather that the facts were otherwise.

COLBY. I believe you. I must believe you:

This gives me freedom.

SIR CLAUDE. But, Colby —

If this should be true — of course it can't be true! —
But I see you believe it. You want to believe it.
Well, believe it, then. But don't let it make a difference
To our relations. Or, perhaps, for the better?
Perhaps we'll be happier together if you think
I am not your father. I'll accept that.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

If you will stay with me. It shall make no difference
To my plans for your future.

COLBY. Thank you, Sir Claude.

You're a very generous man. But now I know who was my father
I must follow my father — so that I may come to know him.

SIR CLAUDE. What do you mean?

COLBY. I want to be an organist.

It doesn't matter about success —
I aimed too high before — beyond my capacity.
I thought I didn't want to be an organist
When I found I had no chance of getting to the top —
That is, to become the organist of a cathedral.
But my father was an unsuccessful organist.

MRS. GUZZARD. You should say, Colby, not very successful.

COLBY. And I wish to follow my father.

SIR CLAUDE. But, Colby:

Don't you remember a talk we had —
So very long ago! — when we shared our ambitions
And shared our disappointment. And you described your feelings
On beginning to learn the ways of business;
The exhilaration of finding you could handle
Matters you would have thought so uncongenial;
And the way in which you felt that you were changing?
That conversation would have convinced me
With no other evidence, that you were my son,
Because you described my own experience, exactly.
Does that mean nothing to you, the experience we shared?
Heaven knows — and you know — I put no obstruction
In the way of your fulfilling your musical ambitions —
Had you been able to fulfil them.
Believe, if you like, that I am not your father:
I'll accept that. I put no claim upon you —
Except the claim of our likeness to each other.
We have undergone the same disillusionment:
I want us to make the best of it, together.

COLBY. No, Sir Claude. I hate to hurt you
As I am hurting you. But it is very different.
As long as I believed that you were my father
I was content to have had the same ambitions
And in the same way to accept their failure.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

You had your father before you, as a model;
You knew your inheritance. Now I know mine.

SIR CLAUDE. I shall never ask you to think of me as a father;
All I ask you is — to regard me as a friend.

COLBY. But you would still think of me as your son.
There can be no relation of father and son
Unless it works both ways. For you to regard me —
As you would — as your son, when I could not think of you
As my father: if I accepted that
I should be guilty towards you. I like you too much.
You've become a man without illusions
About himself, and without ambitions.
Now that I've abandoned *my* illusions and ambitions
All that's left is love. But not on false pretences:
That's why I must leave you.

SIR CLAUDE. Eggerson!
Can't you persuade him?

LADY ELIZABETH. Yes. My poor Claude!
Do try to help him, Eggerson.

EGGERSON. I wouldn't venture.
Mr. Simpkins is a man who knows his own mind.
Is it true, Mr. Simpkins, that what you desire
Is to become the organist of some parish church?

COLBY. That is what I want. If anyone will take me.

EGGERSON. If so, I happen to know of a vacancy
In my own parish, in Joshua Park —
If it should appeal to you. The organist we had
Died two months ago. We've been looking for another.

COLBY. Do you think that they would give me a trial?

EGGERSON. Give you a trial? I'm certain.

Good organists don't seem to want to come to Joshua Park.

COLBY. But I've told you, I'm not a very good organist!

EGGERSON. Don't say that, Mr. Simpkins, until you've tried our organ!

COLBY. Well, if you could induce them to try me . . .

EGGERSON. The Parochial Church Council will be only too pleased,
And I have some influence. *I* am the Vicar's Warden.

COLBY. I'd like to apply.

EGGERSON. The stipend is small —
Very small, I'm afraid. Not enough to live on.
We'll have to think of other ways

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Of making up an income. Piano lessons? —
As a temporary measure; because, Mr. Simpkins —
I hope you won't take this as an impertinence —
I don't see you spending a lifetime as an organist.
I think you'll come to find you've another vocation.
We worked together every day, you know,
For quite a little time, and I've watched you pretty closely.
Mr. Simpkins! You'll be thinking of reading for orders.
And you'll still have your music. Why, Mr. Simpkins,
Joshua Park may be only a stepping-stone
To a precentorship! And a canonry!

COLBY. (We'll cross that bridge when we come to it) Eggers.
Oh, I'm sorry . . .

EGGERSON. Don't be sorry: I'm delighted.
And by the way, a practical point:
If you took the position, you'd want to find your feet
In Joshua Park, before you settled on lodgings;
We have a spare room. We should be most happy
If you cared to stop with us, until you were settled.

COLBY. I'd be very glad indeed — if Mrs. Eggerston approved.

EGGERSON. There'll be no one so pleased as Mrs. E.;
Of that I can assure you.

MRS. GUZZARD. Mr. Eggerston,
I cannot see eye to eye with you,
Having been, myself, the wife of an organist;
But you too, I think, have had a wish realised.
— I believe that this interview can now be terminated.
If you will excuse me, Sir Claude . . .

SIR CLAUDE. Excuse you? Yes.

MRS. GUZZARD. I shall return to Teddington. Colby,
Will you get me a taxi to go to Waterloo?

COLBY. Get you a taxi? Yes, Aunt Sarah;
But I should see you home.

MRS. GUZZARD. Home? Only to a taxi.
Do you mind if I take my leave, Sir Claude?
I'm no longer needed here.

[Exit COLBY]

SIR CLAUDE. Mind? What do I mind?

MRS. GUZZARD. Then I will say goodbye. You have all had your wish
In one form or another. You and I, Sir Claude,

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK

Had *our* wishes twenty-five years ago;
But we failed to observe, when we had our wishes,
That there was a time-limit clause in the contract.

SIR CLAUDE. What's that? Oh. Good-bye, Mrs. Guzzard.

[Exit MRS. GUZZARD]

SIR CLAUDE. What's happened? Have they gone? Is Colby coming
back?

LADY ELIZABETH. My poor Claude!

[LUCASTA crosses to SIR CLAUDE and kneels beside him]

KAGHAN. You know, Claude, I think we all made the same mistake —
All except Eggers . . .

EGGERSON. Me, Mr. Kaghan?

KAGHAN. We wanted Colby to be something he wasn't.

LADY ELIZABETH. I suppose that's true of you and me, Claude.

Between not knowing what other people want of one,
And not knowing what one should ask of other people,
One does make mistakes! But I mean to do better.
Claude, we've got to try to understand our children.

KAGHAN. And we should like to understand *you* . . .

I mean, I'm including both of you,

Claude . . . and Aunt Elizabeth.

You know, Claude, both Lucasta and I

Would like to mean something to you . . . if you'd let us;
And we'd take the responsibility of meaning it.

[LUCASTA puts her arms around SIR CLAUDE]

SIR CLAUDE. Don't leave me, Lucasta.

Eggerson! Do *you* really believe her?

[EGGERSON nods]

CURTAIN

The Cast of the First Production
at the
Edinburgh Festival

Sir Claude Mulhammer

Eggerson

Colby Simpkins

B. Kaghan

Lucasta Angel

Lady Elizabeth Mulhammer

Mrs. Guzzard

PAUL ROGERS

ALAN WEBB

DENHOLM ELLIOTT

PETER JONES

MARGARET LEIGHTON

ISABEL JEANS

ALISON LEGGATT

Presented by HENRY SHEREK

Directed by E. MARTIN BROWNE

Settings designed by HUTCHINSON SCOTT

THE ELDER STATESMAN

TO MY WIFE

*To whom I owe the leaping delight
That quickens my senses in our wakingtime
And the rhythm that governs the repose of our sleepingtime,
The breathing in unison*

*Of lovers . . .
Who think the same thoughts without need of speech
And babble the same speech without need of meaning:*

*To you I dedicate this book, to return as best I can
With words a little part of what you have given me.
The words mean what they say, but some have a further meaning
For you and me only.*

Characters

MONICA CLAVERTON-FERRY

CHARLES HEMINGTON

LAMBERT

LORD CLAVERTON

FEDERICO GOMEZ

MRS. PIGGOTT

MRS. CARGHILL

MICHAEL CLAVERTON-FERRY

ACT ONE

The drawing-room of Lord Claverton's London house. Four o'clock in the afternoon

ACT TWO

The Terrace at Badgley Court. Morning

ACT THREE

The Same. Late afternoon of the following day

Act One

The drawing-room of LORD CLAVERTON's London house. Four o'clock in the afternoon.

[Voices in the hall]

CHARLES. Is your father at home to-day?

MONICA. You'll see him at tea.

CHARLES. But if I'm not going to have you to myself

There's really no point in my staying to tea.

[Enter MONICA and CHARLES carrying parcels]

MONICA. But you *must* stay to tea. That was understood

When you said you could give me the whole afternoon.

CHARLES. But I couldn't say what I wanted to say to you

Over luncheon . . .

MONICA. That's your own fault.

You should have taken me to some other restaurant

Instead of to one where the *maitre d'hôtel*

And the waiters all seem to be your intimate friends.

CHARLES. It's the only place where I'm really well known

And get well served. And when *you're* with me

It must be a perfect lunch.

MONICA. It was a perfect lunch.

But I know what men are — they like to show off.

That's masculine vanity, to want to have the waiters

All buzzing round you: and it reminds the girl

That she's not the only one who's been there with him.

CHARLES. Well, tease me if you like. But a man does feel a fool

If he takes you to a place where he's utterly unknown

And the waiters all appear to be avoiding his eye.

MONICA. We're getting off the point . . .

CHARLES. You've got me off *my* point . . .

I was trying to explain . . .

MONICA. It's simply the question

Of your staying to tea. As you practically promised.

CHARLES. What you don't understand is that I have a grievance.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

On Monday you're leaving London, with your father:
I arranged to be free for the whole afternoon
On the plain understanding . . .

MONICA. That you should stop to tea.

CHARLES. When I said that I was free for the whole afternoon,
That meant you were to give *me* the whole afternoon.
I couldn't say what I wanted to, in a restaurant;
And then you took me on a shopping expedition . . .

MONICA. If you don't like shopping with me . . .

CHARLES. Of course I like shopping with you.
But how can one *talk* on a shopping expedition —
Except to guess what you want to buy
And advise you to buy it.

MONICA. But why not stop to tea?

CHARLES. Very well then, I will stop to tea,
But you know I won't get a chance to talk to you.
You know that. Now that your father's retired
He's at home every day. And you're leaving London.
And because your father simply can't bear it
That any man but he should have you to himself,
Before I've said two words he'll come ambling in . . .

MONICA. You've said a good deal more than two words already.
And besides, my father doesn't amble.
You're not at all respectful.

CHARLES. I try to be respectful;
But you know that I shan't have a minute alone with you.

MONICA. You've already had several minutes alone with me
Which you've wasted in wrangling. But seriously, Charles,
Father's sure to be buried in the library
And he won't think of leaving it until he's called for tea.
So why not talk now? Though I know very well
What it is you want to say. I've heard it all before.

CHARLES. And you'll hear it again. You think I'm going to tell you
Once more, that I'm in love with you. Well, you're right.
But I've something else to say that I haven't said before,
That will give you a shock. I believe *you* love *me*.

MONICA. Oh, what a dominating man you are!
Really, you must imagine you're a hypnotist.

CHARLES. Is this a time to torment me? But I'm selfish
In saying that, because I think —

THE ELDER STATESMAN

I think you're tormenting yourself as well.

MONICA. You're right. I am. Because *I am* in love with you.

CHARLES. So I was right! The moment I'd said it

I was badly frightened. For I didn't *know* you loved me —

I merely wanted to believe it. And I've made you say so!

But now that you've said so, you must say it again,

For I need so much assurance! Are you sure you're not mistaken?

MONICA. How did this come, Charles? It crept so softly

On silent feet, and stood behind my back

Quietly, a long time, a long long time

Before I felt its presence.

CHARLES. Your words seem to come

From very far away. Yet very near. You are changing me

And I am changing you.

MONICA. Already

How much of me is you?

CHARLES. And how much of me is you?

I'm not the same person as a moment ago.

What do the words mean now — *I and you*?

MONICA. In our private world — now we have our private world —

The meanings are different. Look! We're back in the room

That we entered only a few minutes ago.

Here's an armchair, there's the table;

There's the door . . . and I hear someone coming:

It's Lambert with the tea . . .

[*Enter LAMBERT with trolley*]

and I shall say, 'Lambert,

Please let his lordship know that tea is waiting'.

LAMBERT. Yes, Miss Monica.

MONICA. I'm very glad, Charles,

That you *can* stay to tea.

[*Exit LAMBERT*]

— Now we're in the public world.

CHARLES. And your father will come. With his calm possessive air

And his kindly welcome, which is always a reminder

That I mustn't stay too long, for you belong to him.

He seems so placidly to take it for granted

That you don't really care for any company but his!

MONICA. You're not to assume that anything I've said to you

Has given you the right to criticise my father.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

In the first place, you don't understand him;

In the second place, we're not engaged yet.

CHARLES. Aren't we? We're agreed that we're in love with each other,

And, there being no legal impediment

Isn't that enough to constitute an engagement?

Aren't you sure that you want to marry me?

MONICA. Yes, Charles. I'm sure that I want to marry you

When I'm free to do so. But by that time

You may have changed your mind. Such things have happened.

CHARLES. That won't happen to me.

[*Knock. Enter LAMBERT*]

LAMBERT. Excuse me, Miss Monica. His Lordship said to tell you

Not to wait tea for him.

MONICA. Thank you, Lambert.

LAMBERT. He's busy at the moment. But he won't be very long.

[*Exit*]

CHARLES. Don't you understand that you're torturing me?

How long will you be imprisoned, alone with your father

In that very expensive hotel for convalescents

To which you're taking him? And what after that?

MONICA. There are several good reasons why I should go with him.

CHARLES. Better reasons than for marrying me?

What reasons?

MONICA. First, his terror of being alone.

In the life he's led, he's never had to be alone.

And when he's been at home in the evening,

Even when he's reading, or busy with his papers

He needs to have someone else in the room with him,

Reading too — or just sitting — someone

Not occupied with anything that can't be interrupted.

Someone to make a remark to now and then.

And mostly it's been me.

CHARLES. I know it's been you.

It's a pity that you haven't had brothers and sisters

To share the burden. Sisters, I should say,

For your brother's never been of any use to you.

MONICA. And never will be of any use to anybody,

I'm afraid. Poor Michael! Mother spoilt him

And Father was too severe — so they're always at loggerheads.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

CHARLES. But you spoke of several reasons for your going with your father.

Is there any better reason than his fear of solitude?

MONICA. The second reason is exactly the opposite:

It's his fear of being exposed to strangers.

CHARLES. But he's most alive when he's among people

Managing, manoeuvring, cajoling or bullying —

At all of which he's a master. Strangers!

MONICA. You don't understand. It's one thing meeting people

When you're in authority, with authority's costume,

When the man that people see when they meet you

Is not the private man, but the public personage.

In politics Father wore a public label.

And later, as chairman of public companies,

Always his privacy has been preserved.

CHARLES. His privacy has been so well preserved

That I've sometimes wondered whether there was any . . .

Private self to preserve.

MONICA. *There is a private self, Charles.*

I'm sure of that.

CHARLES. You've given two reasons,

One the contradiction of the other.

Can there be a third?

MONICA. The third reason is this:

I've only just been given it by Dr. Selby —

Father is much iller than he is aware of:

It may be, he will never return from Badgley Court.

But Selby wants him to have every encouragement —

If he's hopeful, he's likely to live a little longer.

That's why Selby chose the place. A *convalescent* home

With the atmosphere of an hotel —

Nothing about it to suggest the clinic —

Everything about it to suggest recovery.

CHARLES. This is your best reason, and the most depressing ;

For this situation may persist for a long time,

And you'll go on postponing and postponing our marriage.

MONICA. I'm afraid . . . not a very long time, Charles.

It's almost certain that the winter in Jamaica

Will never take place. 'Make the reservations'

Selby said, 'as if you were going'.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

But Badgley Court's so near your constituency!
You can come down at weekends, even when the House is sitting.
And you can take me out, if Father can spare me.
But he'll simply love having you to talk to!

CHARLES. I know he's used to seeing me about.

MONICA. I've seen him looking at you. He was thinking of himself
When he was your age — when he started like you,
With the same hopes, the same ambitions —
And of his disappointments.

CHARLES. Is that wistfulness,
Compassion, or . . . envy?

MONICA. Envy is everywhere.
Who is without envy? And most people
Are unaware or unashamed of being envious.
It's all we can ask if compassion and wistfulness . . .
And tenderness, Charles! are mixed with envy:
I do believe that he is fond of you.
So you must come often. And Oh, Charles dear —

[Enter LORD CLAVERTON]

MONICA. You've been very long in coming, Father. What have you been doing?

LORD CLAVERTON. Good afternoon, Charles. You might have guessed,
Monica,

What I've been doing. Don't you recognise this book?

MONICA. It's your engagement book.

LORD CLAVERTON. Yes, I've been brooding over it.

MONICA. But what a time for your engagement book!

You know what the doctors said: complete relaxation
And to think about nothing. Though I know that won't be easy.

LORD CLAVERTON. That is just what I was doing.

MONICA. Thinking of nothing?

LORD CLAVERTON. Contemplating nothingness. Just remember:

Every day, year after year, over my breakfast,
I have looked at this book — or one just like it —
You know I keep the old ones on a shelf together;
I could look in the right book, and find out what I was doing
Twenty years ago, to-day, at this hour of the afternoon.
If I've been looking at this engagement book, to-day,
Not over breakfast, but before tea,
It's the empty pages that I've been fingering —

THE ELDER STATESMAN

The first empty pages since I entered Parliament. •

I used to jot down notes of what I had to say to people:

Now I've no more to say, and no one to say it to.

I've been wondering . . . how many more empty pages?

MONICA. You would soon fill them up if we allowed you to!

That's my business to prevent. You know I'm to protect you

From your own restless energy — the inexhaustible

Sources of the power that wears out the machine.

LORD CLAVERTON. They've dried up, Monica, and you know it.

They talk of rest, these doctors, Charles; they tell me to be cautious,

To take life easily. Take life easily!

It's like telling a man he mustn't run for trains

When the last thing he wants is to take a train for anywhere!

No, I've not the slightest longing for the life I've left —

Only fear of the emptiness before me.

If I had the energy to work myself to death

How gladly would I face death! But waiting, simply waiting,

With no desire to act, yet a loathing of inaction.

A fear of the vacuum, and no desire to fill it.

It's just like sitting in an empty waiting room

In a railway station on a branch line,

After the last train, after all the other passengers

Have left, and the booking office is closed

And the porters have gone. What am I waiting for

In a cold and empty room before an empty grate?

For no one. For nothing.

MONICA. Yet you've been looking forward

To this very time! You know how you grumbled

At the farewell banquet, with the tributes from the staff,

The presentation, and the speech you had to make

And the speeches that you had to listen to!

LORD CLAVERTON [*pointing to a silver salver, still lying in its case*].

I don't know which impressed me more, the insincerity

Of what was said about me, or of my reply —

All to thank them for that.

Oh the grudging contributions

That bought this piece of silver! The inadequate levy

That made the Chairman's Price! And my fellow directors

Saying 'we must put our hands in our pockets

To double this collection — it must be something showy'.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

This would do for visiting cards — if people still left cards
And if I was going to have any visitors.

MONICA. Father, you simply want to revel in gloom!

You know you've retired in a blaze of glory —

You've read every word about you in the papers.

CHARLES. And the leading articles saying 'we are confident

That his sagacious counsel will long continue

'To be at the disposal of the Government in power'.

And the expectation that your voice will be heard

In debate in the Upper House . . .

LORD CLAVERTON. The established liturgy

Of the Press on any conspicuous retirement.

My obituary, if I had died in harness,

Would have occupied a column and a half

With an inset, a portrait taken twenty years ago.

In five years' time, it will be the half of that;

In ten years' time, a paragraph.

CHARLES. That's the reward

Of every public man.

LORD CLAVERTON. Say rather, the exequies

Of the failed successes, the successful failures,

Who occupy positions that other men covet.

When we go, a good many folk are mildly grieved,

And our closest associates, the small minority

Of those who really understand the place we filled

Are inwardly delighted. They won't want my ghost

Walking in the City or sitting in the Lords.

And I, who recognise myself as a ghost

Shan't want to be seen there. It makes me smile

To think that men should be frightened of ghosts.

If they only knew how frightened a ghost can be of men!

[Knock. Enter LAMBERT]

LAMBERT. Excuse me, my Lord. There's a gentleman downstairs

Is very insistent that he must see you.

I told him you never saw anyone, my Lord,

But by previous appointment. He said he knew that,

So he had brought this note. He said that when you read it

You would want to see him. Said you'd be very angry

If you heard that he'd gone away without your seeing him.

LORD CLAVERTON. What sort of a person?

THE ELDER STATESMAN

LAMBERT. A foreign person

By the looks of him. But talks good English.

A pleasant-spoken gentleman.

LORD CLAVERTON [*after reading the note*]. I'll see him in the library.

No, stop. I've left too many papers about there.

I'd better see him here.

LAMBERT. Very good, my Lord.

Shall I take the trolley, Miss Monica?

MONICA. Yes, thank you, Lambert.

[*Exit LAMBERT*]

CHARLES. I ought to be going.

MONICA. Let us go into the library. And then I'll see you off.

LORD CLAVERTON. I'm sorry to turn you out of the room like this,

But I'll have to see this man by myself, Monica.

I've never heard of this Señor Gomez

But he comes with a letter of introduction

From a man I used to know. I can't refuse to see him.

Though from what I remember of the man who introduces him

I expect he wants money. Or to sell me something worthless.

MONICA. You ought not to bother with such people now, Father.

If you haven't got rid of him in twenty minutes

I'll send Lambert to tell you that you have to take a trunk call.

Come, Charles. Will you bring my coat?

CHARLES. I'll say goodbye, sir.

And look forward to seeing you both at Badgley Court

In a week or two.

[*Enter LAMBERT*]

LAMBERT. Mr. Gomez, my Lord.

LORD CLAVERTON. Goodbye, Charles. And please remember

That we both want to see you, whenever you can come

If you're in the vicinity. Don't we, Monica?

MONICA. Yes, Father. (*To CHARLES*) We both want to see you.

[*Exeunt MONICA and CHARLES*]

[*LAMBERT shows in GOMEZ*]

LORD CLAVERTON. Good evening, Mr. . . . Gomez. You're a friend of

Mr. Culverwell?

GOMEZ. We're as thick as thieves, you might almost say.

Don't you know me, Dick?

LORD CLAVERTON. Fred Culverwell!

Why do you come back with another name?

THE ELDER STATESMAN

GOMEZ. You've changed your name too, since I knew you.

When we were up at Oxford, you were plain Dick Ferry.

Then, when you married, you took your wife's name

And became Mr. Richard Claverton-Ferry;

And finally, Lord Claverton. I've followed your example,

And done the same, in a modest way.

You know, where *I* live, people do change their names;

And besides, my wife's name is a good deal more normal

In my country, than Culverwell — and easier to pronounce.

LORD CLAVERTON. Have you lived out there ever since . . . you left
England?

GOMEZ. Ever since I finished my sentence.

LORD CLAVERTON. What has brought you to England?

GOMEZ. Call it homesickness,

Curiosity, restlessness, whatever you like.

But I've been a pretty hard worker all these years

And I thought, now's the time to take a long holiday,

Let's say a rest cure — that's what I've come for.

You see, I'm a widower, like you, Dick.

So I'm pretty footloose. Gomez, you see,

Is now a highly respected citizen

Of a central American republic: San Marco.

It's as hard to become a respected citizen

Out there, as it is here. With this qualification:

Out there they respect you for rather different reasons.

LORD CLAVERTON. Do you mean that you've won respect out
there

By the sort of activity that lost you respect

Here in England?

GOMEZ. Not at all, not at all.

I think that was rather an unkind suggestion.

I've always kept on the right side of the law —

And seen that the law turned its right side to *me*.

Sometimes I've had to pay pretty heavily;

But I learnt by experience whom to pay;

And a little money laid out in the right manner

In the right places, pays many times over.

I assure you it does.

LORD CLAVERTON. In other words

You have been engaged in systematic corruption.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

GOMEZ. No, Dick, there's a fault in your logic.

How can one corrupt those who are already corrupted?

I can swear that I've never corrupted anybody.

In fact, I've never come across an official

Innocent enough to be corruptible.

LORD CLAVERTON. It would seem then that most of your business

Has been of such a nature that, if carried on in England,

It might land you in gaol again?

GOMEZ.

That's true enough,

Except for a false inference. I wouldn't dream

Of carrying on such business if I lived in England.

I have the same standards of morality

As the society in which I find myself.

I do nothing in England that you would disapprove of.

LORD CLAVERTON. That's something, at least, to be thankful for.

I trust you've no need to engage in forgery.

GOMEZ. Forgery, Dick? An absurd suggestion!

Forgery, I can tell you, is a mug's game.

I say that — with conviction.

No, forgery, or washing cheques, or anything of that nature,

Is certain to be found out sooner or later.

And then what happens? You have to move on.

That wouldn't do for me. I'm too domestic.

And by the way, I've several children,

All grown up, doing well for themselves.

I wouldn't allow either of my sons

To go into politics. In my country, Dick,

Politicians can't afford mistakes. The prudent ones

Always have an aeroplane ready:

And keep an account in a bank in Switzerland.

The ones who don't get out in time

Find themselves in gaol and not very comfortable,

Or before a firing squad.

You don't know what serious politics is like!

I said to my boys: 'Never touch politics.

Stay out of politics, and play both parties:

What you don't get from one you may get from the other'.

Dick, don't tell me that there isn't any whisky in the house?

LORD CLAVERTON. I can provide whisky. [*Presses the bell*]

But why have you come?

THE ELDER STATESMAN

GOMEZ. You've asked me that already!

To see you, Dick. A natural desire!

For you're the only old friend I can trust.

LORD CLAVERTON. You really trust me? I appreciate the compliment.

GOMEZ. Which you're sure you deserve. But when I say 'trust' . . .

[*Knock. Enter LAMBERT*]

LORD CLAVERTON. Lambert, will you bring in the whisky. And soda.

LAMBERT. Very good, my Lord.

GOMEZ. And some ice.

LAMBERT. Ice? Yes, my Lord.

[*Exit*]

GOMEZ. I began to say: when I say 'trust'

I use the term as experience has taught me.

It's nonsense to talk of trusting people

In general. What does that mean? One trusts a man

Or a woman — in this respect or that.

A won't let me down in this relationship,

B won't let me down in some other connection.

But, as I've always said to my boys:

'When you come to the point where you need to trust someone

You must make it worth his while to be trustworthy'.

[*During this LAMBERT enters silently, deposits tray and exit*]

LORD CLAVERTON. Won't you help yourself?

[*GOMEZ does so, liberally*]

GOMEZ. And what about you?

LORD CLAVERTON. I don't take it, thank you.

GOMEZ. A reformed character!

LORD CLAVERTON. I should like to know why you need to trust *me*.

GOMEZ. That's perfectly simple. I come back to England

After thirty-five years. Can you imagine

What it would be like to have been away from home

For thirty-five years? I was twenty-five —

The same age as you — when I went away,

Thousands of miles away, to another climate,

To another language, other standards of behaviour,

To fabricate for myself another personality

And to take another name. Think what that means —

To take another name.

[*Gets up and helps himself to whisky*]

But of course you know!

THE ELDER STATESMAN

Just enough to think you know more than you do.
You've changed your name twice — by easy stages, *
And each step was merely a step up the ladder,
So you weren't aware of becoming a different person:
But where *I* changed my name, there was no social ladder.
It was jumping a gap — and you can't jump back again.
I parted from myself by a sudden effort,
You, so slowly and sweetly, that you've never woken up
To the fact that Dick Ferry died long ago.
I married a girl who didn't know a word of English,
Didn't want to learn English, wasn't interested
In anything that happened four thousand miles away,
Only believed what the parish priest told her.
I made my children learn English — it's useful;
I always talk to them in English.
But do they think in English? No, they do not.
They think in Spanish, but their thoughts are Indian thoughts.
O God, Dick, *you* don't know what it's like
To be so cut off! Homesickness!
Homesickness is a sickly word.
You don't understand such isolation
As mine, you think you do . . .

LORD CLAVERTON. I'm sure I do,
I've always been alone.

GOMEZ. Oh, loneliness —
Everybody knows what that's like.
Your loneliness — so cosy, warm and padded:
You're not isolated — merely insulated.
It's only when you come to see that you have lost *yourself*
That you are quite alone.

LORD CLAVERTON. I'm waiting to hear
Why you should need to trust me.

GOMEZ. Perfectly simple.
My father's dead long since — that's a good thing.
My mother — I dare say she's still alive,
But she must be very old. And she must think I'm dead;
And as for my married sisters — I don't suppose their husbands
Were ever told the story. *They* wouldn't want to see me.
No, I need one old friend, a friend whom I can trust —
And one who will accept both Culverwell and Gomez —

THE ELDER STATESMAN

See Culverwell as Gomez — Gomez as Culverwell.

I need you, Dick, to give me reality!

LORD CLAVERTON. But according to the description you have given
Of trusting people, how do you propose
To make it worth my while to be trustworthy?

GOMEZ. It's done already, Dick; done many years ago:

Adoption tried, and grappled to my soul

With hoops of steel, and all that sort of thing.

We'll come to that, very soon. Isn't it strange

That there should always have been this bond between us?

LORD CLAVERTON. It has never crossed my mind. Develop the point.

GOMEZ. Well, consider what we were when we went up to Oxford
And then what I became under your influence.

LORD CLAVERTON. You cannot attribute your . . . misfortune to *my*
influence.

GOMEZ. I was just about as different as anyone could be

From the sort of men you'd been at school with —

I didn't fit into your set, and I knew it.

When you started to take me up at Oxford

I've no doubt your friends wondered what you found in me —

A scholarship boy from an unknown grammar school.

I didn't know either, but I was flattered.

Later, I came to understand: you made friends with me

Because it flattered *you* — tickled your love of power

To see that I was flattered, and that I admired you.

Everyone expected that I should get a First.

I suppose your tutor thought you'd be sent down.

It went the other way. You stayed the course, at least.

I had plenty of time to think things over, later.

LORD CLAVERTON. And what is the conclusion that you came to?

GOMEZ. This is how it worked out, Dick. You liked to play the rake,

But you never went too far. There's a prudent devil

Inside you, Dick. He never came to *my* help.

LORD CLAVERTON. I certainly admit no responsibility,

None whatever, for what happened to you later.

GOMEZ. You led me on at Oxford, and left me to it.

And so it came about that I was sent down

With the consequences which you remember:

A miserable clerkship — which your father found for me,

And expensive tastes — which you had fostered in me,

THE ELDER STATESMAN

And, equally unfortunate, a talent for penmanship.

Hence, as you have just reminded me

Defalcation and forgery. And then my stretch

Which gave me time to think it all out.

LORD CLAVERTON. That's the second time you have mentioned your reflections.

But there's just one thing you seem to have forgotten:

I came to your assistance when you were released.

GOMEZ. Yes, and paid my passage out. I know the reason:

You wanted to get rid of me. I shall tell you why presently.

Now let's look for a moment at *your* life history.

You had plenty of money, and you made a good marriage —

Or so it seemed — and with your father's money

And your wife's family influence, you got on in politics.

Shall we say that you did very well by yourself?

Though not, I suspect, as well as you had hoped.

LORD CLAVERTON. I was never accused of making a mistake.

GOMEZ. No, in England mistakes are anonymous

Because the man who accepts responsibility

Isn't the man who made the mistake.

That's your convention. Or if it's known you made it

You simply get moved to another post

Where at least you can't make quite the same mistake.

At the worst, you go into opposition

And let the other people make mistakes

Until your own have been more or less forgotten.

I dare say you did make some mistake, Dick . . .

That would account for your leaving politics

And taking a conspicuous job in the City

Where the Government could always consult you

But of course didn't have to take your advice . . .

I've made a point, you see, of following your career.

LORD CLAVERTON. I am touched by your interest.

GOMEZ. I have a gift for friendship.

I rejoiced in your success. But one thing has puzzled me.

You were given a ministry before you were fifty:

That should have led you to the very top!

And yet you withdrew from the world of politics

And went into the City. Director of a bank

And chairman of companies. You looked the part —

THE ELDER STATESMAN

Cut out to be an impressive figurehead.

But again, you've retired at sixty. Why at sixty?

LORD CLAVERTON. Knowing as much about me as you do

You must have read that I retired at the insistence of my doctors.

GOMEZ. Oh yes, the usual euphemism.

And yet I wonder. It is surprising:

You should have been good for another five years

At least. Why did they let you retire?

LORD CLAVERTON. If you want to know, I had had a stroke.

And I might have another.

GOMEZ. Yes. You might have another.

But I wonder what brought about this . . . stroke;

And I wonder whether you're the great economist

And financial wizard that you're supposed to be.

And I've learned something of other vicissitudes.

Dick, I was very very sorry when I heard

That your marriage had not been altogether happy.

And as for your son — from what I've heard about *him*,

He's followed your undergraduate career

Without the protection of that prudent devil

Of yours, to tell him not to go too far.

Well, now, I'm beginning to be thirsty again.

[Pours himself whisky]

LORD CLAVERTON. An interesting historical epitome.

Though I cannot accept it as altogether accurate.

The only thing I find surprising

In the respected citizen of San Marco

Is that in the midst of the engrossing business

Of the nature of which dark hints have been given,

He's informed himself so carefully about my career.

GOMEZ. I don't propose to give you a detailed account

Of my own career. I've been very successful.

What would have happened to me, I wonder,

If I had never met you? I should have got my First,

And I might have become the history master

In a school like that from which I went to Oxford.

As it is, I'm somebody — a more important man

In San Marco than I should ever have been in England.

LORD CLAVERTON. So, as you consider yourself a success . . .

GOMEZ. A worldly success, Dick. In another sense

THE ELDER STATESMAN

We're both of us failures. But even so,
I'd rather be my kind of failure than yours.

LORD CLAVERTON. And what do you call failure?

GOMEZ. What do I call failure?

The worst kind of failure, in my opinion,
Is the man who has to keep on pretending to himself
That he's a success — the man who in the morning
Has to make up his face before he looks in the mirror.

LORD CLAVERTON. Isn't that the kind of pretence that you're
maintaining

In trying to persuade me of your . . . worldly success?

GOMEZ. No, because I know the value of the coinage
I pay myself in.

LORD CLAVERTON. Indeed! How interesting!

I still don't know why you've come to see me
Or what you mean by saying you can trust me.

GOMEZ. Dick, do you remember the moonlight night
We drove back to Oxford? *You* were driving.

LORD CLAVERTON. That happened several times.

GOMEZ. One time in particular.

You know quite well to which occasion I'm referring —
A summer night of moonlight and shadows —
The night you ran over the old man in the road.

LORD CLAVERTON. You *said* I ran over an old man in the road.

GOMEZ. You knew it too. If you had been surprised
When I said 'Dick, you've run over somebody'
Wouldn't you have shown it, if only for a second?
You never lifted your foot from the accelerator.

LORD CLAVERTON. We were in a hurry.

GOMEZ. More than in a hurry.

You didn't want it to be known where we'd been.
The girls who were with us (what were their names?
I've completely forgotten them) you didn't want *them*
To be called to give evidence. You just couldn't face it.
Do you see now, Dick, why I say I can trust you?

LORD CLAVERTON. If you think that this story would interest the
public

Why not sell your version to a Sunday newspaper?

GOMEZ. My dear Dick, what a preposterous suggestion!
Who's going to accept the unsupported statement

THE ELDER STATESMAN

Of Federico Gomez of San Marco
About something that happened so many years ago?
What damages you'd get! The Press wouldn't look at it.
Besides, you can't think I've any desire
To appear in public as Frederick Culverwell?
No, Dick, your secret's safe with me.
Of course, I might give it to a few friends, in confidence.
It might even reach the ears of some of your acquaintance —
But you'd never know to whom I'd told it,
Or who knew the story and who didn't. I promise you.
Rely upon me as the soul of discretion.

LORD CLAVERTON. What do you want then? Do you need money?

GOMEZ. My dear chap, you are obtuse!

I said: 'Your secret is safe with me',
And then you . . . well, I'd never have believed
That you would accuse an old friend of . . . blackmail!
On the contrary, I dare say I could buy you out
Several times over. San Marco's a good place
To make money in — though not to *keep* it in.
My investments — not all in my own name either —
Are pretty well spread. For the matter of that,
My current account in Stockholm or Zürich
Would keep me in comfort for the rest of my life.
Really, Dick, you owe me an apology.
Blackmail! On the contrary
Any time you're in a tight corner
My entire resources are at your disposal.
You were a generous friend to me once
As you pointedly reminded me a moment ago.
Now it's my turn, perhaps, to do you a kindness.

[Enter LAMBERT]

LAMBERT. Excuse me, my Lord, but Miss Monica asked me
To remind you there's a trunk call coming through for you
In five minutes' time.

LORD CLAVERTON. I'll be ready to take it.

[Exit LAMBERT]

GOMEZ. Ah, the pre-arranged interruption
To terminate the unwelcome intrusion
Of the visitor in financial distress.
Well, I shan't keep you long, though I dare say your caller

THE ELDER STATESMAN

Could hang on for another quarter of an hour.

LORD CLAVERTON. Before you go — what is it that you want?

GOMEZ. I've been trying to make clear that I only want your friendship!

Just as it used to be in the old days

When you taught me expensive tastes. Now it's my turn.

I can have cigars sent direct to you from Cuba

If your doctors allow you a smoke now and then.

I'm a lonely man, Dick, with a craving for affection.

All I want is as much of your company,

So long as I stay here, as I can get.

And the more I get, the longer I may stay.

LORD CLAVERTON.

This is preposterous!

Do you call it friendship to impose your company

On a man by threats? Why keep up the pretence?

GOMEZ. Threats, Dick! How can you speak of threats?

It's most unkind of you. My only aim

Is to renew our friendship. Don't you understand?

LORD CLAVERTON. I see that when I gave you my friendship

So many years ago, I only gained in return

Your envy, spite and hatred. That is why you attribute

Your downfall to me. But how was I responsible?

We were the same age. You were a free moral agent.

You pretend that I taught you expensive tastes:

If you had not had those tastes already

You would hardly have welcomed my companionship.

GOMEZ. Neatly argued, and almost convincing:

Don't you wish you could believe it?

LORD CLAVERTON.

And what if I decline

To give you the pleasure of my company?

GOMEZ. Oh, I can wait, Dick. You'll relent at last.

You'll come to feel easier when I'm with you

Than when I'm out of sight. You'll be afraid of whispers,

The reflection in the mirror of the face behind you,

The ambiguous smile, the distant salutation,

The sudden silence when you enter the smoking room.

Don't forget, Dick:

You *didn't* stop! Well, I'd better be going.

I hope I haven't outstayed my welcome?

Your telephone pal may be getting impatient.

I'll see you soon again.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

LORD CLAVERTON. Not very soon, I think.

I am going away.

GOMEZ. So I've been informed.

I have friends in the press — if not in the peerage.

Goodbye for the present. It's been an elixir

To see you again, and assure myself

That we can begin just where we left off.

[Exit GOMEZ]

[LORD CLAVERTON *sits for a few minutes brooding. A knock. Enter*
MONICA.]

MONICA. Who was it, Father?

LORD CLAVERTON. A man I used to know.

MONICA. Oh, so you knew him?

LORD CLAVERTON. Yes. He'd changed his name.

MONICA. Then I suppose he wanted money?

LORD CLAVERTON. No, he didn't want money.

MONICA. Father, this interview has worn you out.

You must go and rest now, before dinner.

LORD CLAVERTON. Yes, I'll go and rest now. I wish Charles was
dining with us.

I wish we were having a dinner party.

MONICA. Father, can't you bear to be alone with me?

If you can't bear to dine alone with me tonight,

What will it be like at Badgley Court?

CURTAIN

Act Two

The terrace of Badgley Court. A bright sunny morning, several days later.

Enter LORD CLAVERTON and MONICA.

MONICA. Well, so far, it's better than you expected,
Isn't it, Father? They've let us alone;
The people in the dining room show no curiosity;
The beds are comfortable, the hot water is hot,
They give us a very tolerable breakfast;
And the chambermaid really *is* a chambermaid:
For when I asked about morning coffee
She said 'I'm not the one for elevens's,
That's Nurse's business'.

LORD CLAVERTON. So far, so good.
I'll feel more confidence after a fortnight —
After fourteen days of people not staring
Or offering picture papers, or wanting a fourth at bridge;
Still, I'll admit to a feeling of contentment
Already. I only hope that it will last —
The sense of wellbeing! It's often with us
When we are young, but then it's not noticed;
And by the time one has grown to consciousness
It comes less often.

I hope this benignant sunshine
And warmth will last for a few days more.
But this early summer, that's hardly seasonable,
Is so often a harbinger of frost on the fruit trees.

MONICA. Oh, let's make the most of this weather while it lasts.

I never remember you as other than occupied
With anxieties from which you were longing to escape;
Now I want to see you learning to enjoy yourself!

LORD CLAVERTON. Perhaps I've never really enjoyed living
As much as most people. At least, as they seem to do
Without knowing that they enjoy it. Whereas I've often known

THE ELDER STATESMAN

That I didn't enjoy it. Some dissatisfaction
With myself, I suspect, very deep within myself
Has impelled me all my life to find justification
Not so much to the world — first of all to myself.
What is this self inside us, this silent observer,
Severe and speechless critic, who can terrorise us
And urge us on to futile activity,
And in the end, judge us still more severely
For the errors into which his own reproaches drove us?

MONICA. You admit that at the moment you find life pleasant,
That it really does seem quiet here and restful.
Even the matron, though she looks rather dominating,
Has left us alone.

LORD CLAVERTON. Yes, but remember
What she said. She said: 'I'm going to leave you alone!
You want perfect peace: that's what Badgley Court is for.'
I thought that very ominous. When people talk like that
It indicates a latent desire to interfere
With the privacy of others, which is certain to explode.

MONICA. Hush, Father. I see her coming from the house.
Take your newspaper and start reading to me.

[Enter MRS. PIGGOTT]

MRS. PIGGOTT. Good morning, Lord Claverton! Good morning, Miss
Claverton!

Isn't this a glorious morning!
I'm afraid you'll think I've been neglecting you;
So I've come to apologise and explain.
I've been in such a rush, these last few days,
And I thought, 'Lord Claverton will understand
My not coming in directly after breakfast:
He's led a busy life, too.' But I hope you're happy?
Is there anything you need that hasn't been provided?
All you have to do is to make your wants known.
Just ring through to my office. If I'm not there
My secretary will be — Miss Timmins.
She'd be overjoyed to have the privilege of helping you!

MONICA. You're very kind . . . Oh, I'm sorry,
We don't know how we ought to address you.
Do we call you 'Matron'?

MRS. PIGGOTT. Oh no, not 'Matron'!

THE ELDER STATESMAN

Of course, I *am* a matron in a sense —

No, I don't simply mean that I'm a married woman —

A widow in fact. But I was a Trained Nurse,

And of course I've always lived in what you might call

A medical milieu. My father was a specialist

In pharmacology. And my husband

Was a distinguished surgeon. Do you know, I fell in love with him

During an appendicitis operation!

I was a theatre nurse. But you mustn't call me 'Matron'

At Badgley Court. You see, we've studied to avoid

Anything like a nursing-home atmosphere.

We don't want our guests to think of themselves as ill,

Though we never have guests who are perfectly well —

Except when they come like you, Miss Claverton.

MONICA. Claverton-Ferry. Or Ferry: it's shorter.

MRS. PIGGOTT. So sorry. Miss Claverton-Ferry. I'm Mrs. Piggott.

Just call me Mrs. Piggott. It's a short and simple name

And easy to remember. But, as I was saying,

Guests in perfect health are exceptional

Though we never accept any guest who's incurable.

You know, we've been deluged with applications

From people who want to come here to die!

We never accept them. Nor do we accept

Any guest who *looks* incurable —

We make that stipulation to all the doctors

Who send people here. When you go in to lunch

Just take a glance around the dining-room:

Nobody looks ill! They're all convalescents,

Or resting, like you. So you'll remember

Always to call me Mrs. Piggott, won't you?

MONICA. Yes, Mrs. Piggott, but please tell me one thing.

We haven't seen her yet, but the chambermaid

Referred to a nurse. When we see her

Do we address her as 'Nurse'?

MRS. PIGGOTT. Oh yes, that's different.

She is a real nurse, you know, fully qualified.

Our system is very delicately balanced:

For me to be simply 'Mrs. Piggott'

Reassures the guests in one respect;

And calling our nurses 'Nurse' reassures them

THE ELDER STATESMAN

In another respect.

LORD CLAVERTON. I follow you perfectly.

MRS. PIGGOTT. And now I must fly. I've so much on my hands!

But before I go, just let me tuck you up . . .

You must be very careful at this time of year;

This early warm weather can be very treacherous.

There, now you look more comfy. Don't let him stay out late

In the afternoon, Miss Claverton-Ferry.

And remember, when you want to be *very* quiet

There's the Silence Room. With a television set.

It's popular in the evenings. But not *too* crowded.

[Exit]

LORD CLAVERTON. Much as I had feared. But I'm not going to say

Nothing could be worse. Where there's a Mrs. Piggott

There may be, among the guests, something worse than Mrs.

Piggott.

MONICA. Let's hope this was merely the concoction

Which she decants for every newcomer.

Perhaps after what she considers proper courtesies,

She will leave us alone.

[Re-enter MRS. PIGGOTT]

MRS. PIGGOTT. I really *am* neglectful!

Miss Claverton-Ferry, I ought to tell you more

About the amenities which Badgley Court

Can offer to guests of the younger generation.

When there are enough young people among us

We dance in the evening. At the moment there's no dancing,

And it's still too early for the bathing pool.

But several of our guests are keen on tennis,

And of course there's always croquet. But I don't advise croquet

Until you know enough about the other guests

To know whom *not* to play with. I'll mention no names,

But there are one or two who don't like being beaten,

And that spoils any sport, in my opinion.

MONICA. Thank you, Mrs. Piggott. But I'm very fond of walking

And I'm told there are very good walks in this neighbourhood.

MRS. PIGGOTT. There are indeed. I can lend you a map.

There are lovely walks, on the shore or in the hills,

Quite away from the motor roads. You must learn the best walks.

I won't apologise for the lack of excitement:

THE ELDER STATESMAN

After all, peace and quiet is our *raison d'être*.

Now I'll leave you to enjoy it.

[Exit]

MONICA. I hope she won't remember anything else.

LORD CLAVERTON. She'll come back to tell us more about the peace and quiet.

MONICA. I don't believe she'll be bothering us again:

I could see from her expression when she left

That she thought she'd done her duty by us for to-day.

I'm going to prow! about the grounds. Don't look so alarmed!

If you spy any guest who seems to be stalking you

Put your newspaper over your face

And pretend you're pretending to be asleep.

If they think you *are* asleep they'll do something to wake you,

But if they see you're shamming they'll have to take the hint.

[Exit]

A moment later, LORD CLAVERTON spreads his newspaper over his face.

Enter MRS. CARGHILL. She sits in a deckchair nearby, composes herself and takes out her knitting.

MRS. CARGHILL [after a pause]. I hope I'm not disturbing you. I always sit here.

It's the sunniest and most sheltered corner,

And none of the other guests have discovered it.

It was clever of you to find it so quickly.

What made you choose it?

LORD CLAVERTON [throwing down newspaper]. My daughter chose it.

She noticed that it seemed to offer the advantages

Which you have just mentioned. I am glad you can confirm them.

MRS. CARGHILL. Oh, so that is your daughter — that very charming girl?

And obviously devoted to her father.

I was watching you both in the dining room last night.

You are the great Lord Claverton, aren't you?

Somebody said you were coming here —

It's been the topic of conversation.

But I couldn't believe that it would really happen!

And now I'm sitting here talking to you.

Dear me, it's astonishing, after all these years;

And you don't even recognise me! I'd know you anywhere.

But then, we've all seen your portrait in the papers

THE ELDER STATESMAN

So often. And everybody knows *you*. But still,
I wish you could have paid *me* that compliment, Richard.

LORD CLAVERTON. What!

MRS. CARGHILL. Don't you know me yet?

LORD CLAVERTON. I'm afraid not.

MRS. CARGHILL. There were the three of us — Effie, Maudie and me.

That day we spent on the river — I've never forgotten it —

The turning point of all my life!

Now whatever were the names of those friends of yours

And which one was it invited us to lunch?

I declare, I've utterly forgotten their names.

And you gave us lunch — I've forgotten what hotel —

But such a good lunch — and we all went in a punt

On the river — and we had a tea basket

With some lovely little cakes — I've forgotten what you called them,

And you made me try to punt, and I got soaking wet

And nearly dropped the punt pole, and you all laughed at me.

Don't you remember?

LORD CLAVERTON. Pray continue.

The more you remind me of, the better I'll remember.

MRS. CARGHILL. And the three of us talked you over afterwards —

Effie and Maud and I. What a time ago it seems!

It's surprising I remember it all so clearly.

You attracted me, you know, at the very first meeting —

I can't think why, but it's the way things happen.

I said 'there's a man I could follow round the world!'

But Effie it was — you know, Effie was very shrewd —

Effie it was said 'you'd be throwing yourself away.

Mark my words' Effie said, 'if you chose to follow *that* man

He'd give you the slip: he's not to be trusted.

That man is hollow'. That's what she said.

Or did she say 'yellow'? I'm not quite sure.

You do remember now, don't you, Richard?

LORD CLAVERTON. Not the conversation you have just repeated.

That is new to me. But I do remember you.

MRS. CARGHILL. Time has wrought sad changes in me, Richard.

I was very lovely once. So *you* thought,

And others thought so too. But as you remember,

Please, Richard, just repeat my name — just once:

The name by which you knew me. It would give me such a thrill

THE ELDER STATESMAN

To hear you speak my name once more.

LORD CLAVERTON. Your name was Maisie Batterson.

MRS. CARGHILL. Oh, Richard, you're only saying that to tease me.

You know I meant my stage name. The name by which you knew me.

LORD CLAVERTON. Well, then, Maisie Montjoy.

MRS. CARGHILL. Yes. Maisie Montjoy.

I was Maisie Montjoy once. And you didn't recognise me.

LORD CLAVERTON. You've changed your name, no doubt. And I've changed mine.

Your name now and here . . .

MRS. CARGHILL. Is Mrs. John Carghill.

LORD CLAVERTON. You married, I suppose, many years ago?

MRS. CARGHILL. Many years ago, the first time. That didn't last long.

People sometimes say: 'Make one mistake in love,
You're more than likely to make another'.

How true that is! Algy was a weakling,
But simple he was — not sly and slippery.

Then I married Mr. Carghill. Twenty years older
Than me, he was. Just what I needed.

LORD CLAVERTON. Is he still living?

MRS. CARGHILL. He had a weak heart.

And he worked too hard. Have you never heard
Of Carghill Equipments? They make office furniture.

LORD CLAVERTON. I've never had to deal with questions of equipment.

I trust that the business was very successful . . .

I mean, that he left you comfortably provided for?

MRS. CARGHILL. Well, Richard, my doctor could hardly have sent me
here

If I wasn't well off. Yes, I'm provided for.

But isn't it strange that you and I
Should meet here at last? Here, of all places!

LORD CLAVERTON. Why not, of all places? What I don't understand

Is why you should take the first opportunity,
Finding me here, to revive old memories

Which I should have thought we both preferred to leave buried.

MRS. CARGHILL. There you're wrong, Richard. Effie always said —

What a clever girl she was! — 'he doesn't understand women.
Any woman who trusted *him* would soon find that out'.

A man may prefer to forget all the women

THE ELDER STATESMAN

He has loved. But a woman doesn't want to forget
A single one of her admirers. Why, even a faithless lover
Is still, in her memory, a kind of testimonial.
Men live by forgetting — women live on memories.
Besides a woman has nothing to be ashamed of:
A man is always trying to forget
His own shabby behaviour.

LORD CLAVERTON. But we'd settled our account.

What harm was done? I learned my lesson
And you learned yours, if you needed the lesson.

MRS. CARGHILL. You refuse to believe that I was really in love with
you!

Well, it's natural that you shouldn't want to believe it.
But you think, or try to think, that if I'd really suffered
I shouldn't want to let you know who I am,
I shouldn't want to come and talk about the past.
You're wrong, you know. It's both pain and pleasure
To talk about the past — about you and me.
These memories are painful — but I cherish them.

LORD CLAVERTON. If you had really been broken-hearted
I can't see how you could have acted as you did.

MRS. CARGHILL. Who can say whether a heart's been broken
Once it's been repaired? But I know what you mean.
You mean that I would never have started an action
For breach of promise, if I'd really cared for you.
What sentimental nonsense! One starts an action
Simply because one must do *something*.
Well, perhaps I shouldn't have settled out of court.
My lawyer said: 'I advise you to accept',
'Because Mr. Ferry will be standing for Parliament:
His father has political ambitions for him.
If he's lost a breach of promise suit
Some people won't want to appear as his supporters.'
He said: 'What his lawyers are offering in settlement
Is twice as much as I think you'd be awarded.'
Effie was against it — she wanted you exposed.
But I gave way. I didn't want to ruin you.
If I'd carried on, it might have ended your career,
And then you wouldn't have become Lord Claverton.
So perhaps I laid the foundation of your fortunes!

THE ELDER STATESMAN

LORD CLAVERTON. And perhaps at the same time of your own?

I seem to remember, it was only a year or so
Before your name appeared in very large letters
In Shaftesbury Avenue.

MRS. CARGHILL. Yes, I had my art.
Don't you remember what a hit I made
With a number called *It's Not Too Late For You To Love Me?*

I couldn't have put the feeling into it I did
But for what I'd gone through. Did you hear me sing it?

LORD CLAVERTON. Yes, I heard you sing it.

MRS. CARGHILL. And what did you feel?

LORD CLAVERTON. Nothing at all. I remember my surprise
At finding that I felt nothing at all.
I thought, perhaps, what a lucky escape
It had been, for both of us.

MRS. CARGHILL. That 'both of us'
Was an afterthought, Richard. A lucky escape
You thought, for you. You felt no embarrassment?

LORD CLAVERTON. Why should I feel embarrassment? My conscience
was clear.

A brief infatuation, ended in the only way possible
To our mutual satisfaction.

MRS. CARGHILL. Your conscience was clear.
I've very seldom heard people mention their consciences
Except to observe that their consciences were clear.
You got out of a tangle for a large cash payment
And no publicity. So your conscience was clear.
At bottom, I believe you're still the same silly Richard
You always were. You wanted to pose
As a man of the world. And now you're posing
As what? I presume, as an elder statesman;
And the difference between being an elder statesman
And posing successfully as an elder statesman
Is practically negligible. And you look the part.
Whatever part you've played, I must say you've always looked it.

LORD CLAVERTON. I've no longer any part to play, Maisie.

MRS. CARGHILL. There'll always be some sort of part for you
Right to the end. You'll still be playing a part
In your obituary, whoever writes it.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

LORD CLAVERTON. Considering how long ago it was when you knew me

And considering the brevity of our acquaintance,
You're surprisingly confident, I must say,
About your understanding of my character.

MRS. CARGHILL. I've followed your progress year by year, Richard.

And although it's true that our acquaintance was brief,
Our relations were intense enough, I think,
To have given me one or two insights into you.
No, Richard, don't imagine that I'm still in love with you;
And you needn't think I idolise your memory.
It's simply that I feel that we belong together . . .
Now, don't get alarmed. But you touched my soul —
Pawed it, perhaps, and the touch still lingers.
And I've touched yours.

It's frightening to think that we're still together
And more frightening to think that we may *always* be together.
There's a phrase I seem to remember reading somewhere:
Where their fires are not quenched. Do you know what I do?
I read your letters every night.

LORD CLAVERTON. My letters!

MRS. CARGHILL. Have you forgotten that you wrote me letters?

Oh, not very many. Only a few worth keeping.

Only a few. But very beautiful!

It was Effie said, when the break came,

'They'll be worth a fortune to you, Maisie.'

They would have figured at the trial, I suppose,

If there had been a trial. Don't you remember them?

LORD CLAVERTON. Vaguely. Were they very passionate?

MRS. CARGHILL. They were very loving. Would you like to read them?

I'm afraid I can't show you the originals;

They're in my lawyer's safe. But I have photostats

Which are quite as good, I'm told. And I like to read them

In your own handwriting.

LORD CLAVERTON. And have you shown these letters

To many people?

MRS. CARGHILL. Only a few friends.

Effie said: 'If he becomes a famous man

And you should be in want, you could have these letters
auctioned.'

THE ELDER STATESMAN

Yes, I'll bring the photostats tomorrow morning,
And read them to you.

— Oh, there's Mrs. Piggott!

She's bearing down on us. Isn't she frightful!
She never stops talking. Can you bear it?
If I go at once, perhaps she'll take the hint
And leave us alone tomorrow.

Good morning, Mrs. Piggott!

Isn't it a glorious morning!

[Enter MRS. PIGGOTT]

MRS. PIGGOTT. Good morning, Mrs. Carghill!

MRS. CARGHILL.

Dear Mrs. Piggott!

It seems to me that you never sit still:

You simply sacrifice yourself for us.

MRS. PIGGOTT. It's the breath of life to me, Mrs. Carghill,

Attending to my guests. I like to feel they *need* me!

MRS. CARGHILL. You do look after us well, Mrs. Piggott:

You're so considerate — and so understanding.

MRS. PIGGOTT. But I ought to introduce you. You've been talking to

Lord Claverton,

The famous Lord Claverton. This is Mrs. Carghill.

Two of our very nicest guests!

I just came to see that Lord Claverton was comfortable:

We can't allow him to tire himself with talking.

What he needs is *rest*! You're not going, Mrs. Carghill?

MRS. CARGHILL. Oh, I knew that Lord Claverton had come for a rest
cure,

And it struck me that he might find it a strain

To have to cope with both of us at once.

Besides, I ought to do my breathing exercises.

[Exit]

MRS. PIGGOTT. As a matter of fact, I flew to your rescue

(That's why I've brought your morning tippie myself
Instead of leaving it, as usual, to Nurse)

When I saw that Mrs. Carghill had caught you.

You wouldn't know that name, but you might remember her
As Maisie Montjoy in revue.

She was well-known at one time. I'm afraid her name

Means nothing at all to the younger generation,

But you and I should remember her, Lord Claverton.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

That tune she was humming, *It's Not Too Late For You To Love Me*,

Everybody was singing it once. A charming person,
I dare say, but not quite your sort or mine.
I suspected that she wanted to meet you, so I thought
That I'd take the first opportunity of hinting —
Tactfully, of course — that you should not be disturbed.
Well, she's gone now. If she bothers you again
Just let me know. I'm afraid it's the penalty
Of being famous.

[Enter MONICA]

Oh, Miss Claverton-Ferry!

I didn't see you coming. Now I must fly.

[Exit]

MONICA. I saw Mrs. Piggott bothering you again
So I hurried to your rescue. You look tired, Father.
She ought to know better. But I'm all the more distressed
Because I have some . . . not very good news for you.

LORD CLAVERTON. Oh, indeed. What's the matter?

MONICA. I didn't get far.

I met Michael in the drive. He says he must see you.

I'm afraid that something unpleasant has happened.

LORD CLAVERTON. Was he driving his car?

MONICA. No, he was walking.

LORD CLAVERTON. I hope he's not had another accident.

You know, after that last escapade of his,

I've lived in terror of his running over somebody.

MONICA. Why, Father, should you be afraid of that?

This shows how bad your nerves have been.

He only ran into a tree.

LORD CLAVERTON. Yes, a tree.

It might have been a man. But it can't be that,

Or he wouldn't be at large. Perhaps he's in trouble

With some woman or other. I'm sure he has friends

Whom he wouldn't care for you or me to know about.

MONICA. It's probably money.

LORD CLAVERTON. If it's only debts

Once more, I expect I can put up with it.

But where is he?

MONICA. I told him he must wait in the garden

THE ELDER STATESMAN

Until I had prepared you. I've made him understand
That the doctors want you to be free from worry.
He won't make a scene. But I can see he's frightened.
And you know what Michael is like when he's frightened.
He's apt to be sullen and quick to take offence.
So I hope you'll be patient.

LORD CLAVERTON. Well then, fetch him.
Let's get this over.

MONICA. [calls] Michael!
[Enter MICHAEL]

LORD CLAVERTON. Good morning, Michael.

MICHAEL. Good morning, Father.
[A pause]

What a lovely day!

I'm glad you're here, to enjoy such weather.

LORD CLAVERTON. You're glad I'm here? Did you drive down from
London?

MICHAEL. I drove down last night. I'm staying at a pub
About two miles from here. Not a bad little place.

LORD CLAVERTON. Why are you staying there? I shouldn't have thought
It would be the sort of place that you'd choose for a holiday.

MICHAEL. Well, this isn't a holiday exactly.

But this hotel was very well recommended.

Good cooking, for a country inn. And not at all expensive.

LORD CLAVERTON. You don't normally consider that a
recommendation.

Are you staying there long? For the whole of this holiday?

MICHAEL. Well, this isn't a holiday, exactly.

Oh. I said that before, didn't I?

MONICA. I wish you'd stop being so polite to each other.

Michael, you know what you've come to ask of Father
And Father knows that you want something from him.
Perhaps you'll get to the point if I leave you together.

[Exit]

MICHAEL. You know, it's awfully hard to explain things to *you*.
You've always made up your mind that I was to blame
Before you knew the facts. The first thing I remember
Is being blamed for something I hadn't done.
I never got over that. If you always blame a person
It's natural he should end by getting into trouble.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

LORD CLAVERTON. You started pretty early getting into trouble,
When you were expelled from your prep school for stealing.
But come to the point. You're in trouble again.
We'll ignore, if you please, the question of blame:
Which will spare you the necessity of blaming someone else.
Just tell me what's happened.

MICHAEL. Well, I've lost my job.

LORD CLAVERTON. The position that Sir Alfred Walter made for you.

MICHAEL. I'd stuck it for two years. And deadly dull it was.

LORD CLAVERTON. Every job is dull, nine-tenths of the time . . .

MICHAEL. I need something much more stimulating.

LORD CLAVERTON. Well?

MICHAEL. I want to find some more speculative business.

LORD CLAVERTON. I dare say you've tried a little private speculation.

MICHAEL. Several of my friends gave me excellent tips.

They always came off — the tips I didn't take.

LORD CLAVERTON. And the ones you did take?

MICHAEL. Not so well, for some reason.

The fact is, I needed a good deal more capital

To make anything of it. If I could have borrowed more

I might have pulled it off.

LORD CLAVERTON. Borrowed? From whom?

Not . . . from the firm?

MICHAEL. I went to a lender,

A man whom a friend of mine recommended.

He gave me good terms, on the strength of my name:

The only good the name has ever done me.

LORD CLAVERTON. On the strength of your name. And what do you
call good terms?

MICHAEL. I'd nothing at all to pay for two years:

The interest was just added on to the capital.

LORD CLAVERTON. And how long ago was that?

MICHAEL. Nearly two years.

Time passes pretty quickly, when you're in debt.

LORD CLAVERTON. And have you other debts?

MICHAEL. Oh, ordinary debts:

My tailor's bill, for instance.

LORD CLAVERTON. I expected that.

It was just the same at Oxford.

MICHAEL. It's their own fault.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

They won't send in their bills, and then I forget them.

It's being your son that gets me into debt.

Just because of your name they insist on giving credit.

LORD CLAVERTON. And your debts: are they the cause of your being discharged?

MICHAEL. Well, partly. Sir Alfred did come to hear about it,

And so he pretended to be very shocked.

Said he couldn't retain any man on his staff

Who'd taken to gambling. Called me a gambler!

Said he'd communicate with you about it.

LORD CLAVERTON. That accounts for your coming down here so precipitately —

In order to let me have your version first.

I dare say Sir Alfred's will be rather different.

And what else did he say?

MICHAEL. He took the usual line,

Just like the headmaster. And my tutor at Oxford.

'Not what we expected from the son of your father'

And that sort of thing. It's for your sake, he says,

That he wants to keep things quiet. I can tell you, it's no joke

Being the son of a famous public man.

You don't know what I suffered, working in that office.

In the first place, they all knew the job had been made for me

Because I was your son. They considered me superfluous;

They knew I couldn't be living on my pay;

They had a lot of fun with me — sometimes they'd pretend

That I was overworked, when I'd nothing to do.

Even the office boys began to sneer at me.

I wonder I stood it as long as I did.

LORD CLAVERTON. And does this bring us to the end of the list of your shortcomings?

Or did Sir Alfred make other unflattering criticisms?

MICHAEL. Well, there was one thing he brought up against me,

That I'd been too familiar with one of the girls.

He assumed it had gone a good deal further than it had.

LORD CLAVERTON. Perhaps it had gone further than you're willing to admit.

MICHAEL. Well, after all, she was the only one

Who was at all nice to me. She wasn't exciting,

But it served to pass the time. It would never have happened

THE ELDER STATESMAN

If only I'd been given some interesting work!

LORD CLAVERTON. And what do you now propose to do with yourself?

MICHAEL. I want to go abroad.

LORD CLAVERTON. You want to go abroad?

Well, that's not a bad idea. A few years out of England

In one of the Dominions, might set you on your feet.

I have connections, or at least correspondents

Almost everywhere. Australia — no.

The men I know there are all in the cities:

An outdoor life would suit you better.

How would you like to go to Western Canada?

Or what about sheep farming in New Zealand?

MICHAEL. Sheep farming? Good Lord, no.

That's not my idea. I want to make money.

I want to be somebody on my own account.

LORD CLAVERTON. But what do you want to do? Where do you want to go?

What kind of a life do you think you want?

MICHAEL. I simply want to lead a life of my own,

According to my own ideas of good and bad,

Of right and wrong. I want to go far away

To some country where no one has heard the name of Claverton;

Or where, if I took a different name — and I might choose to —

No one would know or care what my name had been.

LORD CLAVERTON. So you are ready to repudiate your family,

To throw away the whole of your inheritance?

MICHAEL. What is my inheritance? As for your title,

I know why you took it. And Mother knew.

First, because it gave you the opportunity

Of retiring from politics, not without dignity,

Being no longer wanted. And you wished to be Lord Claverton

Also, to hold your own with Mother's family —

To lord it over them, in fact. Oh, I've no doubt

That the thought of passing on your name and title

To a son, was gratifying. But it wasn't for *my* sake!

I was just your son — that is to say,

A kind of prolongation of your existence,

A representative carrying on business in your absence.

Why should I thank you for imposing this upon me?

And what satisfaction, I wonder, will it give you

THE ELDER STATESMAN

In the grave? If you're still conscious after death,
I bet it will be a surprised state of consciousness.
Poor ghost! reckoning up its profit and loss
And wondering why it bothered about such trifles.

LORD CLAVERTON. So you want me to help you to escape from your father!

MICHAEL. And to help my father to be rid of *me*.

You simply don't know how very much pleasanter
You will find life become, once I'm out of the country.
What I'd like is a chance to go abroad
As a partner in some interesting business.
But I might be expected to put up some capital.

LORD CLAVERTON. What sort of business have you in mind?

MICHAEL. Oh, I don't know. Import and export,
With an opportunity of profits both ways.

LORD CLAVERTON. This is what I will do for you, Michael.

I will help you to make a start in any business
You may find for yourself — if, on investigation,
I am satisfied about the nature of the business.

MICHAEL. Anyway, I'm determined to get out of England.

LORD CLAVERTON. Michael! Are there reasons for your wanting to go
Beyond what you've told me? It isn't . . . manslaughter?

MICHAEL. Manslaughter? Why manslaughter? Oh, you mean on the road.

Certainly not. I'm far too good a driver.

LORD CLAVERTON. What then? That young woman?

MICHAEL. I'm not such a fool

As to get myself involved in a breach of promise suit
Or somebody's divorce. No, you needn't worry
About that girl — or any other.
But I want to get out. I'm fed up with England.

LORD CLAVERTON. I'm sure you don't mean that. But it's natural enough

To want a few years abroad. It might be very good for you
To find your feet. But I shouldn't like to think
That what inspired you was no positive ambition
But only the desire to escape.

MICHAEL. I'm not a fugitive.

LORD CLAVERTON. No, not a fugitive from justice —
Only a fugitive from reality.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

Oh Michael! If you had some aim of high achievement,
Some dream of excellence, how gladly would I help you!
Even though it carried you away from me forever
To suffer the monotonous sun of the tropics
Or shiver in the northern night. Believe me, Michael:
Those who flee from their past will always lose the race.
I know this from experience. When you reach your goal,
Your imagined paradise of success and grandeur,
You will find your past failures waiting there to greet you.
You're all I have to live for, Michael —
You and Monica. If I lived for twenty years
Knowing that my son had played the coward —
I should merely be another twenty years in dying.

MICHAEL. Very well: if you like, call me a coward.
I wonder whether you would play the hero
If you were in my place. I don't believe you would.
You didn't suffer from the handicap that I've had.
Your father was rich, but was no one in particular,
So you'd nothing to live up to. Those standards of conduct
You've always made so much of, for my benefit:
I wonder whether *you* have always lived up to them.

[MONICA *has entered unobserved*]

MONICA. Michael! How can you speak to Father like that?
Father! What has happened? Why do you look so angry?
I know that Michael must be in great trouble,
So can't you help him?

LORD CLAVERTON. I am trying to help him,
And to meet him half way. I have made him an offer
Which he must think over. But if he goes abroad
I want him to go in a very different spirit
From that which he has just been exhibiting.

MONICA. Michael! Say something.

MICHAEL. What is there to say?
I want to leave England, and make my own career:
And Father simply calls me a coward.

MONICA. Father! You know that I would give my life for you.
Oh, how silly that phrase sounds! But there's no vocabulary
For love within a family, love that's lived in
But not looked at, love within the light of which
All else is seen, the love within which

THE ELDER STATESMAN

All other love finds speech.

This love is silent.

What can I say to you?

However Michael has behaved, Father,

Whatever Father has said, Michael,

You must forgive each other, you must love each other.

MICHAEL. I could have loved Father, if he'd wanted love,

But he never did, Monica, not from me.

You know I've always been very fond of you —

I've a very affectionate nature, really,

But . . .

[Enter MRS. CARGHILL *with despatch-case*]

MRS. CARGHILL. Richard! I didn't think you'd still be here.

I came back to have a quiet read of your letters;

But how nice to find a little family party!

I know who you are! You're Monica, of course:

And this must be your brother, Michael.

I'm right, aren't I?

MICHAEL. Yes, you're right.

But . . .

MRS. CARGHILL. How did I know? Because you're so like your father

When he was your age. He's the picture of you, Richard,

As you were once. You're not to introduce us,

I'll introduce myself. I'm Maisie Montjoy!

That means nothing to you, my dears.

It's a very long time since the name of Maisie Montjoy

Topped the bill in revue. Now I'm Mrs. John Carghill.

Richard! It's astonishing about your children:

Monica hardly resembles you at all,

But Michael — your father has changed a good deal

Since I knew him ever so many years ago,

Yet you're the image of what he was then.

Your father was a very dear friend of mine once.

MICHAEL. Did he really look like me?

MRS. CARGHILL. You've his voice! and his way of moving! It's
marvellous.

And the charm! He's inherited all of your charm, Richard.

There's no denying it. But who's this coming?

It's another new guest here. He's waving to us.

Do you know him, Richard?

THE ELDER STATESMAN

LORD CLAVERTON. It's a man I used to know.

MRS. CARGHILL. How interesting! He's a very good figure
And he's rather exotic-looking. Is he a foreigner?

LORD CLAVERTON. He comes from some place in Central
America.

MRS. CARGHILL. How romantic! I'd love to meet him.
He's coming to speak to us. You must introduce him.

[Enter GOMEZ]

GOMEZ. Good morning, Dick.

LORD CLAVERTON. Good morning, Fred.

GOMEZ. You weren't expecting me to join you here, were you?
You're here for a rest cure. I persuaded my doctor
That I was in need of a rest cure too.
And when I heard you'd chosen to come to Badgley Court
I said to my doctor, 'Well, what about it?
What better recommendation could I have?'
So he sent me here.

MRS. CARGHILL. Oh, you've seen each other lately?
Richard, I think that you might introduce us.

LORD CLAVERTON. Oh. This is . . .

GOMEZ. Your old friend Federico Gomez,
The prominent citizen of San Marco.
That's my name.

LORD CLAVERTON. So let me introduce you — by that name —
To Mrs. . . . Mrs. . . .

MRS. CARGHILL. Mrs. John Carghill.

GOMEZ. We seem a bit weak on the surnames, Dick!

MRS. CARGHILL. Well, you see, Señor Gomez, when we first became
friends —

Lord Claverton and I — I was known by my stage name.
There was a time, once, when everyone in London
Knew the name of Maisie Montjoy in revue.

GOMEZ. If Maisie Montjoy was as beautiful to look at
As Mrs. Carghill, I can well understand
Her success on the stage.

MRS. CARGHILL. Oh, did you never see me?
That's a pity, Señor Gomez.

GOMEZ. I lost touch with things in England.
Had I been in London, and in Dick's position
I should have been your most devoted admirer.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

MRS. CARGHILL. *It's Not Too Late For You To Love Me!* That's the song

That made my reputation, Señor Gomez.

GOMEZ. It will never be too late. Don't you agree, Dick?

— This young lady I take to be your daughter?

And this is your son?

LORD CLAVERTON. This is my son Michael,

And my daughter Monica.

MONICA. How do you do.

Michael!

MICHAEL. How do you do.

MRS. CARGHILL. I don't believe you've known Lord Claverton

As long as I have, Señor Gomez.

GOMEZ. My dear lady, you're not old enough

To have known Dick Ferry as long as I have.

We were friends at Oxford.

MRS. CARGHILL. Oh, so you were at Oxford!

Is that how you come to speak such perfect English?

Of course, I could tell from your looks that you were Spanish.

I do like Spaniards. They're so aristocratic.

But it's very strange that we never met before.

You were a friend of Richard's at Oxford

And Richard and I became great friends

Not long afterwards, didn't we, Richard?

GOMEZ. I expect that was after I had left England.

MRS. CARGHILL. Of course, that explains it. After Oxford

I suppose you went back to . . . where is your home?

GOMEZ. The republic of San Marco.

MRS. CARGHILL. Went back to San Marco.

Señor Gomez, if it's true you're staying at Badgley Court,

I warn you — I'm going to cross-examine you

And make you tell me all about Richard

In his Oxford days.

GOMEZ. On one condition:

That you tell me all about Dick when you knew him.

MRS. CARGHILL [*pats her despatch-case*]. Secret for secret, Señor

Gomez!

You've got to be the first to put your cards on the table!

MONICA. Father, I think you should take your rest now.

— I must explain that the doctors were very insistent

THE ELDER STATESMAN

That my father should rest and have absolute quiet
Before every meal.

LORD CLAVERTON. But Michael and I
Must continue our discussion. This afternoon, Michael.

MONICA. No, I think you've had enough talk for to-day.
Michael, as you're staying so close at hand
Will you come back in the morning? After breakfast?

LORD CLAVERTON. Yes, come tomorrow morning.

MICHAEL. Well, I'll come tomorrow morning.

MRS. CARGHILL. Are you staying in the neighbourhood, Michael?
Your father is such an old friend of mine
That it seems most natural to call you Michael.
You don't mind, do you?

MICHAEL. No, I don't mind.
I'm staying at the George — it's not far away.

MRS. CARGHILL. Then I'd like to walk a little way with you.

MICHAEL. Delighted, I'm sure.

GOMEZ. Taking a holiday?
You're in business in London, aren't you?

MICHAEL. Not a holiday, no. I've been in business in London,
But I think of cutting loose, and going abroad.

MRS. CARGHILL. You must tell me all about it. Perhaps I could advise
you.

We'll leave you now, Richard. Au revoir, Monica.
And Señor Gomez, I shall hold you to your promise!

[*Exeunt* MRS. CARGHILL and MICHAEL]

GOMEZ. Well, Dick, we've got to obey our doctors' orders.
But while we're here, we must have some good talks
About old times. Bye bye for the present.

[*Exit*]

MONICA. Father, those awful people. We mustn't stay here.
I want you to escape from them.

LORD CLAVERTON. What I want to escape from
Is myself, is the past. But what a coward I am,
To talk of escaping! And what a hypocrite!
A few minutes ago I was pleading with Michael
Not to try to escape from his own past failures:
I said I knew from experience. Do I understand the meaning
Of the lesson I would teach? Come, I'll start to learn again.
Michael and I shall go to school together.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

We'll sit side by side, at little desks
And suffer the same humiliations
At the hands of the same master. But have I still time?
There is time for Michael. Is it too late for me, Monica?

CURTAIN

Act Three

Same as Act Two. Late afternoon of the following day. MONICA seated alone. Enter CHARLES.

CHARLES. Well, Monica, here I am. I hope you got my message.

MONICA. Oh Charles, Charles, Charles, I'm so glad you've come!

I've been so worried, and rather frightened.

It was exasperating that they couldn't find me

When you telephoned this morning. That Mrs. Piggott

Should have heard my beloved's voice

And I couldn't, just when I had been yearning

For the sound of it, for the caress that is in it!

Oh Charles, how I've wanted you! And now I *need* you.

CHARLES. My darling, what I want is to know that you need me.

On that last day in London, you admitted that you loved me,

But I wondered . . . I'm sorry, I couldn't help wondering

How much your words meant. You didn't seem to need me then.

And you said we weren't engaged yet . . .

MONICA.

We're engaged now.

At least *I'm* engaged. I'm engaged to you for ever.

CHARLES. There's another shopping expedition we must make!

But my darling, since I got your letter this morning

About your father and Michael, and those people from his past,

I've been trying to think what I could do to help him.

If it's blackmail, and that's very much what it looks like,

Do you think I could persuade him to confide in me?

MONICA. Oh Charles! How could anyone blackmail Father?

Father, of all people the most scrupulous,

The most austere. It's quite impossible.

Father with a guilty secret in his past!

I just can't imagine it.

[CLAVERTON *has entered unobserved*]

MONICA. I never expected you from *that* direction, Father!

I thought you were indoors. Where have you been?

THE ELDER STATESMAN

LORD CLAVERTON. Not far away. Standing under the great beech tree.

MONICA. Why under the beech tree?

LORD CLAVERTON.

I feel drawn to that spot.

No matter. I heard what you said about guilty secrets.

There are many things not crimes, Monica,

Beyond anything of which the law takes cognisance:

Temporary failures, irreflective aberrations,

Reckless surrenders, unexplainable impulses,

Moments we regret in the very next moment,

Episodes we try to conceal from the world.

Has there been nothing in your life, Charles Hemington,

Which you wish to forget? Which you wish to keep unknown?

CHARLES. There are certainly things I would gladly forget, Sir,

Or rather, which I wish had never happened.

I can think of things you don't yet know about me, Monica,

But there's nothing I would ever wish to conceal from you.

LORD CLAVERTON. If there's nothing, truly nothing, that you couldn't tell Monica

Then all is well with you. You're in love with each other —

I don't need to be told what I've seen for myself!

And if there is nothing that you conceal from *her*

However important you may consider it

To conceal from the rest of the world — your soul is safe.

If a man has one person, just one in his life,

To whom he is willing to confess everything —

And that includes, mind you, not only things criminal,

Not only turpitude, meanness and cowardice,

But also situations which are simply ridiculous,

When he has played the fool (as who has not?) —

Then he loves that person, and his love will save him.

I'm afraid that I've never loved anyone, really.

No, I do love my Monica — but there's the impediment:

It's impossible to be quite honest with your child

If you've never been honest with anyone older,

On terms of equality. To one's child one can't reveal oneself

While she is a child. And by the time she's grown

You've woven such a web of fiction about you!

I've spent my life in trying to forget myself,

In trying to identify myself with the part

I had chosen to play. And the longer we pretend

THE ELDER STATESMAN

The harder it becomes to drop the pretence,
Walk off the stage, change into our own clothes
And speak as ourselves. So I'd become an idol
To Monica. She worshipped the part I played:
How could I be sure that she would love the actor
If she saw him, off the stage, without his costume and makeup
And without his stage words. Monica!
I've had your love under false pretences.
Now, I'm tired of keeping up those pretences,
But I hope that you'll find a little love in your heart
Still, for your father, when you know him
For what he is, the broken-down actor.

MONICA. I think I should only love you the better, Father,
The more I knew about you. I should understand you better.
There's nothing I'm afraid of learning about Charles,
There's nothing I'm afraid of learning about you.

CHARLES. I was thinking, Sir — forgive the suspicion —
From what Monica has told me about your fellow guests,
Two persons who, she says, claim a very long acquaintance —
I was thinking that if there's any question of blackmail,
I've seen something of it in my practice at the bar.
I'm sure I could help.

MONICA. Oh Father, do let him.

CHARLES. At least, I think I know the best man to advise you.

LORD CLAVERTON. Blackmail? Yes, I've heard that word before,
Not so very long ago. When I asked him what he wanted.
Oh no, he said, I want nothing from you
Except your friendship and your company.
He's a very rich man. And she's a rich woman.
If people merely blackmail you to get your company
I'm afraid the law can't touch them.

CHARLES. Then why should you submit?
Why not leave Badgley and escape from them?

LORD CLAVERTON. Because they are not real, Charles. They are merely
ghosts:

Spectres from my past. They've always been with me
Though it was not till lately that I found the living persons
Whose ghosts tormented me, to be only human beings,
Malicious, petty, and I see myself emerging
From my spectral existence into something like reality.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

MONICA. But what did the ghosts mean? All these years

You've kept them to yourself. Did Mother know of them?

LORD CLAVERTON. Your mother knew nothing about them. And I know

That I never knew your mother, as she never knew me.

I thought that she would never understand

Or that she would be jealous of the ghosts who haunted me.

And I'm still of that opinion. How open one's heart

When one is sure of the wrong response?

How make a confession with no hope of absolution?

It was not her fault. We never understood each other.

And so we lived, with a deep silence between us,

And she died silently. She had nothing to say to me.

I think of your mother, when she lay dying:

Completely without interest in the life that lay behind her

And completely indifferent to whatever lay ahead of her.

MONICA. It is time to break the silence! Let us share your ghosts!

CHARLES. But these are only human beings, who can be dealt with.

MONICA. Or only ghosts, who can be exorcised!

Who are they, and what do they stand for in your life?

LORD CLAVERTON. . . . And yet they've both done better for themselves

In consequence of it all. He admitted as much,

Fred Culverwell . . .

MONICA. Fred Culverwell?

Who is Fred Culverwell?

LORD CLAVERTON. He no longer exists.

He's Federico Gomez, the Central American,

A man who's made a fortune by his own peculiar methods,

A man of great importance and the highest standing

In his adopted country. He even has sons

Following in their father's footsteps

Who are also successful. What would *he* have been

If he hadn't known me? Only a schoolmaster

In an obscure grammar school somewhere in the Midlands.

As for Maisie Batterson . . .

MONICA. Maisie Batterson?

Who is Maisie Batterson?

LORD CLAVERTON. She no longer exists.

Nor the musical comedy star, Maisie Montjoy.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

There is Mrs. John Carghill, the wealthy widow.
But Freddy Culverwell and Maisie Batterson,
And Dick Ferry too, and Richard Ferry —
These are my ghosts. They were people with good in them,
People who might all have been very different
From Gomez, Mrs. Carghill and Lord Claverton.
Freddy admired me, when we were at Oxford;
What did I make of his admiration?

I led him to acquire tastes beyond his means:
So he became a forger. And so he served his term.
Was I responsible for that weakness in him?
Yes, I was.

How easily we ignore the fact that those who admire us
Will imitate our vices as well as our virtues —
Or whatever the qualities for which they did admire us!
And that again may nourish the faults that they were born with.
And Maisie loved me, with whatever capacity
For loving she had — self-centred and foolish —
But we should respect love always when we meet it;
Even when it's vain and selfish, we must not abuse it.
That is where I failed. And the memory frets me.

CHARLES. But all the same, these two people mustn't persecute you.
We can't allow that. What hold have they upon you?

LORD CLAVERTON. Only the hold of those who know
Something discreditable, dishonourable . . .

MONICA. Then, Father, you should tell *us* what they already know.
Why should you wish to conceal from those who love you
What is known so well to those who hate you?

LORD CLAVERTON. I will tell you very briefly
And simply. As for Frederick Culverwell,
He re-enters my life to make himself a reminder
Of one occasion the memory of which
He knows very well, has always haunted me.
I was driving back to Oxford. We had two girls with us.
It was late at night. A secondary road.
I ran over an old man lying in the road
And I did not stop. Then another man ran over him.
A lorry driver. He stopped and was arrested,
But was later discharged. It was definitely shown
That the old man had died a natural death

THE ELDER STATESMAN

And had been run over after he was dead.
It was only a corpse that we had run over
So neither of us killed him. But *I* didn't stop.
And all my life I have heard, from time to time,
When I least expected, between waking and sleeping,
A voice that whispered, 'you didn't stop!'
I knew the voice: it was Fred Culverwell's.

MONICA. Poor Father! All your life! And no one to share it with;
I never knew how lonely you were
Or why you were lonely.

CHARLES. And Mrs. Carghill:
What has she against you?

LORD CLAVERTON. I was her first lover.
I would have married her — but my father prevented that:
Made it worth while for her not to marry me —
That was his way of putting it — and of course
Made it worth while for me not to marry her.
In fact, we were wholly unsuited to each other,
Yet she had a peculiar physical attraction
Which no other woman has had. And she knows it.
And she knows that the ghost of the man I was
Still clings to the ghost of the woman who was Maisie.
We should have been poor, we should certainly have quarrelled,
We should have been unhappy, might have come to divorce;
But she hasn't forgotten or forgiven me.

CHARLES. This man, and this woman, who are so vindictive:
Don't you see that they were as much at fault as you
And that they know it? That's why they are inspired
With revenge — it's their means of self-justification.
Let them tell their versions of their miserable stories,
Confide them in whispers. They cannot harm you.

LORD CLAVERTON. Your reasoning's sound enough. But it's
irrelevant.

Each of them remembers an occasion
On which I ran away. Very well.
I shan't run away now — run away from *them*.
It is through this meeting that I shall at last escape them.
— I've made my confession to you, Monica:
That is the first step taken towards my freedom,
And perhaps the most important. I know what you think.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

You think that I suffer from a morbid conscience,
From brooding over faults I might well have forgotten.
You think that I'm sickening, when I'm just recovering!
It's hard to make other people realise
The magnitude of things that appear to them petty;
It's harder to confess the sin that no one believes in
Than the crime that everyone can appreciate.
For the crime is in relation to the law
And the sin is in relation to the sinner.
What has made the difference in the last five minutes
Is not the heinousness of my misdeeds
But the fact of my confession. And to you, Monica,
To you, of all people.

CHARLES. I grant you all that.

But what do you propose? How long, Lord Claverton,
Will you stay here and endure this persecution?

LORD CLAVERTON. To the end. The place and time of liberation
Are, I think, determined. Let us say no more about it.
Meanwhile, I feel sure they are conspiring against me.
I see Mrs. Carghill coming.

MONICA. Let us go.

LORD CLAVERTON. We will stay here. Let her join us.

[Enter MRS. CARGHILL]

MRS. CARGHILL. I've been hunting high and low for you, Richard!
I've some very exciting news for you!
But I suspect . . . Dare I? Yes, I'm sure of it, Monica!
I can tell by the change in your expression to-day;
This must be your fiancé. Do introduce him.

MONICA. Mr. Charles Hemington. Mrs. Carghill.

CHARLES. How do you do.

MRS. CARGHILL. What a charming name!

CHARLES. I'm glad my name meets with your approval, Mrs. Carghill.

MRS. CARGHILL. And let me congratulate *you*, Mr. Hemington.

You're a very lucky man, to get a girl like Monica.

I take a great interest in her future.

Fancy! I've only known her two days!

But I feel like a mother to her already.

You may say that I just missed being her mother!

I've known her father for a very long time,

And there was a moment when I almost married him,

THE ELDER STATESMAN

Oh so long ago. So you see, Mr. Hemington,
I've come to regard her as my adopted daughter.
So much so, that it seems odd to call you Mr. Hemington:
I'm going to call you Charles!

CHARLES. As you please, Mrs. Carghill.

LORD CLAVERTON. You said you had some exciting news for us.
Would you care to impart it?

MRS. CARGHILL. It's about dear Michael.

LORD CLAVERTON. Oh? What about Michael?

MRS. CARGHILL. He's told me all his story.

You've cruelly misunderstood him, Richard.

How he must have suffered! So I put on my thinking cap.

I know you've always thought me utterly brainless,

But I have an idea or two, now and then.

And in the end I discovered what Michael really wanted

For making a new start. He wants to go abroad!

And find his own way in the world. That's very natural.

So I thought, why not appeal to Señor Gomez?

He's a wealthy man, and very important

In his own country. And a friend of Michael's father!

And I found him only too ready to help.

LORD CLAVERTON. And what was Señor Gomez able to suggest?

MRS. CARGHILL. Ah! That's the surprise for which I've come to
prepare you.

Dear Michael is so happy — all his problems are solved;

And he was so perplexed, poor lamb. Let's all rejoice together.

[Enter GOMEZ and MICHAEL]

LORD CLAVERTON. Well, Michael, you know I expected you this
morning,

But you never came.

MICHAEL. No, Father. I'll explain why.

LORD CLAVERTON. And I learn that you have discussed your problems
With Mrs. Carghill and then with Señor Gomez.

MICHAEL. When I spoke, Father, of my wish to get abroad,

You couldn't see my point of view. What's the use of chasing

Half round the world, for the same sort of job

You got me here in London? With another Sir Alfred

Who'd constitute himself custodian of my morals

And send you back reports. Some sort of place

Where everyone would sneer at the fellow from London,

THE ELDER STATESMAN

The limey remittance man for whom a job was made.
No! I want to go where I can make my own way,
Not merely be your son. That's what Señor Gomez sees.
He understands my point of view, if *you* don't.
And he's offered me a job which is just what I wanted.

LORD CLAVERTON. Yes, I see the advantage of a job created for you
By Señor Gomez . . .

MICHAEL. It's not created for me.

Señor Gomez came to London to find a man to fill it,
And he thinks I'm just the man.

GOMEZ. Yes, wasn't it extraordinary.

LORD CLAVERTON. Of course you're just the man that Señor Gomez
wants,

But in a different sense, and for different reasons
From what you think. Let me tell you about Gomez.
He's unlikely to try to be custodian of your morals;
His real name is Culverwell . . .

GOMEZ. My dear Dick,
You're wasting your time, rehearsing ancient history.
Michael knows it already. I've told him myself.
I thought he'd better learn the facts from me
Before he heard your distorted version.
But, Dick, I was nettled by that insinuation
About my not being custodian of Michael's morals.
That is just what I should be! And most appropriate,
Isn't it, Dick, when we recall
That you were once custodian of *my* morals:
Though of course you went a little *faster* than I did.

LORD CLAVERTON. On that point, Fred, you're wasting *your* time:
My daughter and my future son-in-law
Understand that allusion. I have told them the story
In explanation of our . . . intimacy
Which they found puzzling.

MRS. CARGHILL. Oh, Richard!
Have you explained to them our intimacy too?

LORD CLAVERTON. I have indeed.

MRS. CARGHILL. The romance of my life.
Your father was simply *irresistible*
In those days. I melted the first time he looked at me!
Some day, Monica, I'll tell you all about it.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

MONICA. I am satisfied with what I know already, Mrs. Carghill,
About you.

MRS. CARGHILL. But I was very lovely then.

GOMEZ. We are sure of that! You're so lovely now
That we can well imagine you at . . . what age were you?

MRS. CARGHILL. Just eighteen.

LORD CLAVERTON. Now, Michael,
Señor Gomez says he has told you his story.
Did he include the fact that he served a term in prison?

MICHAEL. He told me everything. It was his experience
With you, that made him so understanding
Of my predicament.

LORD CLAVERTON. And made him invent
The position which he'd come to find the man for.

MICHAEL. I don't care about that. He's offered me the job
With a jolly good screw, and some pickings in commissions.
He's made a fortune there. San Marco for me!

LORD CLAVERTON. And what are your duties to be? Do you know?

MICHAEL. We didn't go into details. There's time for that later.

GOMEZ. Much better to wait until we get there.
The nature of business in San Marco
Is easier explained in San Marco than in England.

LORD CLAVERTON. Perhaps you intend to change your name to
Gomez?

GOMEZ. Oh no, Dick, there are plenty of other good names.

MONICA. Michael, Michael, you can't abandon your family
And your very self — it's a kind of suicide.

CHARLES. Michael, you think Señor Gomez is inspired by
benevolence —

MICHAEL. I told you he'd come to London looking for a man
For an important post on his staff —

CHARLES. A post the nature of which is left very vague

MICHAEL. It's confidential, I tell you.

CHARLES. So I can imagine:
Highly confidential . . .

GOMEZ. Be careful, Mr. Barrister.
You ought to know something about the law of slander.
Here's Mrs. Carghill, a reliable witness.

CHARLES. I know enough about the law of libel and slander
To know that you are hardly likely to invoke it.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

And, Michael, here's another point to think of:
Señor Gomez has offered you a post in San Marco,
Señor Gomez pays your passage . . .

MICHAEL. And an advance of salary.

CHARLES. Señor Gomez pays your passage . . .

GOMEZ. Just as many years ago
His father paid mine.

CHARLES. This return of past kindness
No doubt gives you pleasure?

GOMEZ. Yes, it's always pleasant
To repay an old debt. And better late than never.

CHARLES. I see your point of view. Can you really feel confidence,
Michael, in a man who aims to gratify, through you,
His lifelong grievance against your father?
Remember, you put yourself completely in the power
Of a man you don't know, of the nature of whose business
You know nothing. All you can be sure of
Is that he served a prison sentence for forgery.

GOMEZ. Well, Michael, what do you say to all this?

MICHAEL. I'll say that Hemington has plenty of cheek.

Señor Gomez and I have talked things over, Hemington . . .

GOMEZ. As two men of the world, we discussed things very frankly;
And I can tell you, Michael's head is well screwed on.
He's got brains, he's got flair. When he does come back
He'll be able to buy you out many times over.

MRS. CARGHILL. Richard, I think it's time *I* joined the conversation.
My late husband, Mr. Carghill, was a business man —
I wish you could have known him, Señor Gomez!
You're very much alike in some ways —
So I understand business. Mr. Carghill told me so.
Now, Michael has great abilities for business.
I saw that, and so does Señor Gomez.
He's simply been suffering, poor boy, from frustration.
He's been waiting all this time for opportunity
To make use of his gifts; and now, opportunity —
Opportunity has come knocking at the door.
Richard, you must not bar his way. That would be shameful.

LORD CLAVERTON. I cannot bar his way, as you know very well.
Michael's a free agent. So if he chooses
To place himself in your power, Fred Culverwell,

THE ELDER STATESMAN

Of his own volition to contract his enslavement,
I cannot prevent him. I have something to say to you,
Michael, before you go. I shall never repudiate you
Though you repudiate me. I see now clearly
The many many mistakes I have made
My whole life through, mistake upon mistake,
The mistaken attempts to correct mistakes
By methods which proved to be equally mistaken.
I see that your mother and I, in our failure
To understand each other, both misunderstood you
In our divergent ways. When I think of your childhood,
When I think of the happy little boy who was Michael,
When I think of your boyhood and adolescence,
And see how all the efforts aimed at your good
Only succeeded in defeating each other,
How can I feel anything but sorrow and compunction?

MONICA. Oh Michael, remember, you're my only brother
And I'm your only sister. You never took much notice of me.
When we were growing up we seldom had the same friends.
I took all that for granted. So I didn't know till now
How much it means to me to have a brother.

MICHAEL. Why of course, Monica. You know I'm very fond of you
Though we never really seemed to have much in common.
I remember, when I came home for the holidays
How it used to get on my nerves, when I saw you
Always sitting there with your nose in a book.
And once, Mother snatched a book away from you
And tossed it into the fire. How I laughed!
You never seemed even to want a flirtation,
And my friends used to chaff me about my highbrow sister.
But all the same, I was fond of you, and always shall be.
We don't meet often, but if we're fond of each other,
That needn't interfere with your life or mine.

MONICA. Oh Michael, you haven't understood a single word
Of what I said. You must make your own life
Of course, just as I must make mine.
It's not a question of your going abroad
But a question of the spirit which inspired your decision:
If you wish to renounce your father and your family
What is left between you and me?

THE ELDER STATESMAN

MICHAEL. That makes no difference.

You'll be seeing me again.

MONICA. But who will you be

When I see you again? Whoever you are then

I shall always pretend that it is the same Michael.

CHARLES. And when do you leave England?

MICHAEL. When we can get a passage.

And I must buy my kit. We're just going up to London.

Señor Gomez will attend to my needs for that climate.

And you see, he has friends in the shipping line

Who he thinks can be helpful in getting reservations.

MRS. CARGHILL. It's wonderful, Señor Gomez, how you manage
everything!

— No sooner had I put my proposal before him

Than he had it all planned out! It really was an inspiration —

On my part, I mean. Are you listening to me, Richard?

You look very *distract*. You ought to be excited!

LORD CLAVERTON. Is this good-bye then, Michael?

MICHAEL. Well, that just depends.

I could look in again. If there's any point in it.

Personally, I think that when one's come to a decision,

It's as well to say good-bye at once and be done with it.

LORD CLAVERTON. Yes, if you're going, and I see no way to stop you,

Then I agree with you, the sooner the better.

We may never meet again, Michael.

MICHAEL. I don't see why not.

GOMEZ. At the end of five years he will get his first leave.

MICHAEL. Well . . . there's nothing more to say, is there?

LORD CLAVERTON. Nothing at all.

MICHAEL. Then we might as well be going.

GOMEZ. Yes, we might as well be going.

You'll be grateful to me in the end, Dick.

MRS. CARGHILL. A parent isn't always the right person, Richard,

To solve a son's problems. Sometimes an outsider,

A friend of the family, can see more clearly.

GOMEZ. Not that I deserve any credit for it.

We can only regard it as a stroke of good fortune

That I came to England at the very moment

When I could be helpful.

MRS. CARGHILL. It's truly providential!

THE ELDER STATESMAN

MONICA. Good-bye Michael. Will you let me write to you?

GOMEZ. Oh, I'm glad you reminded me. Here's my business card

With the full address. You can always reach him there.

But it takes some days, you know, even by air mail.

MONICA. Take the card, Charles. If I write to you, Michael,

Will you ever answer?

MICHAEL. Oh of course, Monica.

You know I'm not much of a correspondent;

But I'll send you a card, now and again,

Just to let you know I'm flourishing.

LORD CLAVERTON. Yes, write to Monica.

GOMEZ. Well, good-bye Dick. And good-bye Monica.

Good-bye, Mr. . . . Hemington.

MONICA. Good-bye Michael.

[*Exeunt MICHAEL and GOMEZ*]

MRS. CARGHILL. I'm afraid this seems awfully sudden to you,

Richard;

It isn't so sudden. We talked it all over.

But I've got a little piece of news of my own:

Next autumn, I'm going out to Australia,

On my doctor's advice. And on my way back

Señor Gomez has invited me to visit San Marco.

I'm so excited! But what pleases me most

Is that I shall be able to bring you news of Michael.

And now that we've found each other again,

We must always keep in touch. But you'd better rest now.

You're looking rather tired. I'll run and see them off.

[*Exit MRS. CARGHILL*]

MONICA. Oh Father, Father, I'm so sorry!

But perhaps, perhaps, Michael may learn his lesson.

I believe he'll come back. If it's all a failure

Homesickness, I'm sure, will bring him back to us;

If he prospers, that will give him confidence —

It's only self-confidence that Michael is lacking.

Oh Father, it's not you and me he rejects,

But himself, the unhappy self that he's ashamed of.

I'm sure he loves us.

LORD CLAVERTON. Monica my dear,

What you say comes home to me. I fear for Michael;

Nevertheless, you are right to hope for something better.

THE ELDER STATESMAN

And when he comes back, if he does come back,
I know that you and Charles will do what you can
To make him feel that he is not estranged from you.

CHARLES. We will indeed. We shall be ready to welcome him
And give all the aid we can. But it's both of you together
Make the force to attract him: you and Monica combined.

LORD CLAVERTON. I shall not be here. You heard me say to him
That this might be a final good-bye.

I am sure of it now. Perhaps it is as well.

MONICA. What do you mean, Father? You'll be here to greet him.
But one thing I'm convinced of: you must leave Badgley Court.

CHARLES. Monica is right. You should leave.

LORD CLAVERTON. This may surprise you: I feel at peace now.

It is the peace that ensues upon contrition
When contrition ensues upon knowledge of the truth.
Why did I always want to dominate my children?
Why did I mark out a narrow path for Michael?
Because I wanted to perpetuate myself in him.
Why did I want to keep you to myself, Monica?
Because I wanted you to give your life to adoring
The man that I pretended to myself that I was,
So that I could believe in my own pretences.
I've only just now had the illumination
Of knowing what love is. We all think we know,
But how few of us do! And now I feel happy —
In spite of everything, in defiance of reason,
I have been brushed by the wing of happiness.
And I am happy, Monica, that you have found a man
Whom you can love for the man he really is.

MONICA. Oh Father, I've always loved you,
But I love you more since I have come to know you
Here, at Badgley Court. And I love you the more
Because I love Charles.

LORD CLAVERTON. Yes, my dear.
Your love is for the real Charles, not a make-believe,
As was your love for me.

MONICA. But not now, Father!
It's the real you I love — the man you are,
Not the man I thought you were.

LORD CLAVERTON. And Michael —

THE ELDER STATESMAN

I love him, even for rejecting me,
For the *me* he rejected, I reject also.
I've been freed from the self that pretends to be someone;
And in becoming no one, I begin to live.
It is worth while dying, to find out what life is.
And I love you, my daughter, the more truly for knowing
That there is someone you love more than your father —
That you love and are loved. And now that I love Michael,
I think, for the first time — remember, my dear,
I am only a beginner in the practice of loving —
Well, that is something.

I shall leave you for a while.

This is your first visit to us at Badgley Court,
Charles, and not at all what you were expecting.
I am sorry you have had to see so much of persons
And situations not very agreeable.
You two ought to have a little time together.
I leave Monica to you. Look after her, Charles,
Now and always. I shall take a stroll.

MONICA. At this time of day? You'll not go far, will you?

You know you're not allowed to stop out late
At this season. It's chilly at dusk.

LORD CLAVERTON. Yes, it's chilly at dusk. But I'll be warm enough.
I shall not go far.

[Exit CLAVERTON]

CHARLES. He's a very different man from the man he used to be.
It's as if he had passed through some door unseen by us
And had turned and was looking back at us
With a glance of farewell.

MONICA. I can't understand his going for a walk.

CHARLES. He wanted to leave us alone together!

MONICA. Yes, he wanted to leave us alone together.

And yet, Charles, though we've been alone to-day
Only a few minutes, I've felt all the time . . .

CHARLES. I know what you're going to say!

We *were* alone together, in some mysterious fashion,
Even with Michael, and despite those people,
Because somehow we'd begun to belong together,
And that awareness . . .

MONICA. Was a shield protecting both of us . . .

THE ELDER STATESMAN

CHARLES. So that now we are conscious of a new person
Who is you and me together.

Oh my dear,
I love you to the limits of speech, and beyond.
It's strange that words are so inadequate.
Yet, like the asthmatic struggling for breath,
So the lover must struggle for words.

MONICA. I've loved you from the beginning of the world.
Before you and I were born, the love was always there
That brought us together.

Oh Father, Father!
I could speak to you now.

CHARLES. Let me go and find him.

MONICA. We will go to him together. He is close at hand,
Though he has gone too far to return to us.
He is under the beech tree. It is quiet and cold there.
In becoming no one, he has become himself.
He is only my father now, and Michael's.
And I am happy. Isn't it strange, Charles,
To be happy at this moment?

CHARLES. It is not at all strange.
The dead has poured out a blessing on the living.

MONICA. Age and decrepitude can have no terrors for me,
Loss and vicissitude cannot appal me,
Not even death can dismay or amaze me
Fixed in the certainty of love unchanging.

I feel utterly secure
In you; I am a part of you. Now take me to my father.

CURTAIN

